

PART 3

Unity and Coherence

Good academic writers follow specific steps to make sure their writing is both clear and accurate. They gather, organize, and develop ideas. They write drafts, sometimes two or more. When they revise each draft, good writers look for unity, coherence, and grammatical problems.

Rhetorical Focus

Unity within a Paragraph

A paragraph must have unity. A paragraph has unity when all the sentences support a single idea.

- The paragraph must have one controlling idea in the topic sentence. Otherwise the paragraph loses focus.
- The supporting sentences must support or explain the controlling idea with examples, details, steps, or definitions. Otherwise, the paragraph will not be about one single idea.
- The concluding sentence should restate the idea in the topic sentence. Otherwise the main idea might not be clear.

Topic sentence

My friend Macarena is generous.

Supporting sentences

She often lets travelers stay in her home. She has hosted many students temporarily. She sends money to her family in Chile every month to help them with their bills. She always brings flowers or food to her friends when they are sick or have a need.

Concluding sentence

Macarena is one of the most generous people I know.

Note that all the sentences are about Macarena's generosity. A sentence about the way she looks or about her job will not support the unity of the paragraph unless it somehow relates to Macarena's generosity.

Exercise 1 **Reading a student paragraph**

Read the paragraph. Where did the pink sheep come from?

The Pink Sheep

Many years ago, a special gift came to me in an interesting way. When I was a small boy, I enjoyed playing in my garden. One day, I found a hole in the wall of my garden. It was near the ground, so I could not see through the hole, but I knew that behind the wall was my neighbor's garden. Who made that hole? I felt really interested, so I used rocks to make the hole wider. One day, when I was trying to break through the wall, I noticed a small hand appear from the hole. The hand was holding a rubber sheep. It was pink and it had wide eyes. I caught that rubber sheep. Then I pushed my favorite wooden truck through the hole to give to that child on the other side. Sometimes I bought toys with my lucky New Year money. A long time later, when I was old enough to go out, I went around the corner to find the child who gave me that special gift, but nobody was in that house. My neighbor said that a girl used to live there, and she was the same age as me. I never found her, but her gift has a special meaning for me.

Exercise 2 **Analyzing a student paragraph for unity**

Examine the organization of the paragraph by answering the questions below. Then compare your answers with a partner.

1. Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea.
2. After you read the controlling idea, what did you expect the supporting ideas to explain. Write your answer in your own words.

3. One sentence in the paragraph is off-topic and does not support the unity of the paragraph. Draw a line through it.
4. Why does this sentence hurt the unity of the paragraph? Write your explanation below.

Exercise 3 Recognizing unity in supporting sentences

Read the following topic sentences. Put a check (✓) next to each sentence below that supports the topic sentence.

1. I am an organized person.
 - ☒ a. My desk is always neat and tidy.
 - ☒ b. I have a system for organizing my papers, and I can always find what I need.
 - ☐ c. I feel uncomfortable when I am in a strange environment.
 - ☒ d. My friends always want me to help them put their closets in order.
2. Twenty questions is an easy game to play when you are traveling.
 - ☐ a. The person who is "it" must think of a person, place, or object.
 - ☐ b. Sometimes people travel by car, and sometimes by train or airplane.
 - ☐ c. It is very important to travel with people that you get along with.
 - ☐ d. The other players take turns asking questions that can only be answered with "yes" or "no."
3. Tea and coffee are very different from each other.
 - ☐ a. Coffee has more caffeine than tea does.
 - ☐ b. Coffee and tea both have caffeine.
 - ☐ c. People enjoy tea and coffee during social occasions.
 - ☐ d. Tea is much more common around the world than coffee is.
4. In my opinion, people spend too much money on cars.
 - ☐ a. Some drivers spend a fourth of their income for a car payment, which is unnecessary.
 - ☐ b. Cars do not increase in value, so they are not a great investment.
 - ☐ c. Car companies are always looking for ways to make vehicles safer on the road.
 - ☐ d. People who do not pay cash must also pay interest, so they lose even more money.
5. It is easy to get a sports injury.
 - ☐ a. Many people enjoy sports.
 - ☐ b. Runners often have problems with their ankles and knees.
 - ☐ c. Basketball players can break their fingers or get knocked over by another player.
 - ☐ d. Many people make the simple mistake of joining a gym, and then they never go there to exercise.

6. My city is famous because of its architecture.
- _____ a. We have ancient red-tiled buildings around the main square.
 - _____ b. The restaurants near the beach serve great seafood.
 - _____ c. It has expensive tree-lined boulevards with beautiful limestone buildings and monuments.
 - _____ d. A famous university is located on the side of a mountain.

Exercise 4 **Editing for unity**

Read the paragraph below. Cross out the two sentences that are not about the controlling idea.

Life in a New Place

I am a Thai girl living in the U.S., and there are many adjustments that I must make. First of all, I must get used to a new kind of food. I am learning to eat a lot of hamburgers because they are not expensive and they are easy to buy. The people are different and I am learning to meet new foreign friends. For example, two of my new friends are from Pakistan. Pakistan is also an interesting country to visit. The weather requires another kind of adjustment. Some days, it is hot just as in my country, but on other days it is cold and this is very strange for me. I came to the U.S. to study and I enjoy my classes and my teachers. I am adjusting to the U.S. in many ways, but it is not a problem for me because I like to know about different places and people.

Exercise 5 **Developing unity**

Write two supporting sentences for each of the following topic sentences. Then exchange books with a partner and check your partner's sentences for unity.

1. Computers are useful in many ways.

2. There are certain characteristics that I always look for in a good restaurant.

3. When I want to look nice for a party, I follow a few simple steps.

4. There are activities in a park for family members of all ages.

5. There are many ways to show respect to older people.

6. When you are going camping, there are some things you should always take with you.

Rhetorical Focus

Coherence within a Paragraph

A paragraph must also have coherence. This means that the supporting details are organized so that information that goes together appears together.

Writers often use **time**, **space**, or **order of importance** to present the supporting information in a paragraph coherently. The following example is organized by space.

When you drive into the airport, you will see many signs for the different terminals. After you pass the signs, you will drive over a hill. The airport is on the other side of the hill. On your right, you will see the international terminal. This terminal is two stories tall. The front is all glass. On the left, you will see the domestic terminals...