

Technical English, Lecture 5: Principles of composition

Hossam A. H. Fahmy

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The paragraph

- A subject requires subdivision into topics, each of which should be made the subject of a paragraph.
- The beginning of each paragraph is a signal to the reader that a new step in the development of the subject has been reached.
- As a rule, single sentences should not be written or printed as paragraphs. The possible exception is for sentences of transition that indicate the relation between the parts of an exposition or argument.

9. Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic.
10. As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning.
11. Use the active voice.
12. Put statements in positive form.
13. Omit needless words.
14. Avoid a succession of loose sentences.
15. Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form.
16. Keep related words together.
17. In summaries, keep to one tense.
18. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

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Within the paragraph

Do you remember what we said about speed reading?

1. The topic sentence comes at or near the beginning;
2. the succeeding sentences explain or establish or develop the statement made in the topic sentence; and
3. the final sentence either emphasizes the thought of the topic sentence or states some important consequence.

The relation of the paragraph to what precedes, or its function as a part of the whole, may need to be expressed.

"I have recently graduated from the Electrical and Communications Engineering department at Cairo University where I completed a Bachelor program. My decision to pursue graduate studies in Wireless Communication Systems Engineering was the natural culmination of my undergraduate coursework in Electrical and Electronics Engineering where I majored in Communication Systems. Also, I wanted to broaden my horizons and gain relevant exposure in the field of Hardware Design."



"I received my bachelor degree in 2006, majoring in communications, from the Electronics and Communications Engineering Department of Cairo University. Graduate studies in Wireless Communication Systems Engineering is a natural continuation to my undergraduate coursework. It will also help me to gain relevant experiences in the field of Hardware Design."

Related words

Keep the words related in thought together.

1. Cast iron, when treated in a Bessemer converter, is changed into steel.
2. By treatment in a Bessemer converter, cast iron is changed into steel.
3. By treatment in a Bessemer converter, cast iron transforms into steel.
4. By treatment in a Bessemer converter, cast iron becomes steel.

Use the same form for "parallel" structures.

In spring, summer, or in winter.

In spring, summer, or winter. (In spring, in summer, or in winter.)

This rule applies to itemizations and enumerations.

Tenses

In technical papers:

- Keep to the present tense. The results of your past experiments are "facts" that are still true now.
- Avoid future and past!
- You may use present participle in conclusions. Often, you can still use the present tense.

This paper has shown ⇒ The results show

End with a punch

The proper place for “prominent” words is usually the end of the sentence. Compare

1. This steel is principally used for making razors, because of its hardness.
2. Because of its hardness, this steel is principally used in making razors.
3. Because of its hardness, the principal use of this steel is to make razors.

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Grouping the rules

We may divide those rules in two groups depending on what they provide

Clarity

9. Write one paragraph to each topic.

12. Put statements in positive form.

13. Omit needless words.

15. Express parallel ideas in similar form.

16. Keep related words together.

17. Keep to one tense in summaries.

Style

10. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

11. Use the active voice.

14. Avoid groups of loose sentences.

18. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

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