

# JENSEN'S FORMAT WRITING

how to write  
easily and well

FRODE JENSEN

essay  
thesis  
introduction  
transition  
précis  
notecard  
format  
appendix  
endnote  
bibliography  
annotation  
paragraph  
style  
resume

# FORMAT WRITING

## Table of Contents

To the Student & to the Teacher	5-10
Single Paragraph Formats	11-32
Elements of the 5 Paragraph Essay	33-55
5 Paragraph Essay Formats	55-75
Practical Applications	76-84
Business Writing	85-103
The Principle of Condensation	104-114
Major Papers	115-133
Check Sheets & Forms	134-143
Tests	144-146
Answer Keys	147-150
Sample Schedules	151-152
Index	153-154

# ESSENTIALS OF GOOD PARAGRAPHS

INTRODUCTION: Structure and development of the paragraph

Unless a piece of writing is extremely short, it is usually divided into parts called paragraphs consisting of several sentences and offset from the rest of the materials by indentation or spacing. A paragraph is not only a physical division; it also is a unit of the writer's thought used to show which sentences are closely related. Additionally, it is a series of sentences developing only one topic, a new paragraph being used for each new topic. The important parts of paragraph development are listed below. This information applies to paragraphs that stand alone without reference to any other writing and to body paragraphs of any multiple paragraph essay.

## 1. Topic Sentences

- A. usually at the beginning of the paragraph, introduces the topic
- B. tells the reader what the paragraph is about, states the purpose
- C. gives unity to the paragraph

## 2. Body

- A. a series of supporting sentences explaining the topic sentence
- B. contains details, examples, incidents, facts, and reasons which support the topic sentence
- C. generally developed by any of seven common methods
- D. has unity and coherence

### 1) clear, logical sequence of events

- a) chronological order of time
- b) spatial order (by position)
- c) order of importance

### 2) transitional devices

- a) chronological words: *first, second, meanwhile, later, afterward, finally, etc.*
- b) spatial words: *next to, in front of, beside, between, behind, etc.*
- c) other words expressing relationships of ideas: *however, nevertheless, in fact, yet, because, etc.*

### 3) completeness

- a) free of mechanical and spelling errors
- b) correct grammar usage
- c) correct sentence structure

## 3. Conclusion or clincher

- A. end of the paragraph
- B. restates or sums up the topic sentence in different words

## GOOD PARAGRAPH PRACTICES

The following information is to be applied particularly to paragraphs but has application to longer works as well. Once a point of view or tense is adopted, it should be retained throughout the exposition, be it a paragraph or a lengthier piece. Subordination of ideas also applies albeit in a more expanded manner. Sentences within a paragraph are akin to paragraphs within an essay; in other words, there is a hierarchy of ideas and their organization; these are replicated from the paragraph to the essay as a whole.

### Point of view

Point of view is perspective, the person in which the writing is expressed. There are three persons: first, second, and third. First person is the person speaking. In this case the sentences use pronouns such as *I, me, my, our*, and *we*. Use of the first person when writing generally lends a highly personal tone to the work. Second person is the person being spoken to, *you* and its associated pronouns. Use of the second person in writing gives the work an exhortative tone; the writer is telling the audience directly. Third person is the person being spoken about; pronouns such as *he, her, him, it, they, their*, and *his* are used in this situation. Using the third person in writing lends a somewhat objective or impersonal tone to the writing. The rule is to be consistent. A writer can pick any of the three perspectives. In fact, different objectives and topics in the writing lend themselves to particular perspectives. Once a perspective is adopted, however, that perspective should not be shifted. The key here is to monitor the subjects of sentences and check to see that each and every subject follows suit. Not following suit is an error; it commonly falls under improper usage and is often marked as *person shift*.

### Tense

Tense is a grammatical category; there are two tenses: past and present. The first verb in any verb combination or cluster shows the tense. The rule is to remain in the same tense during the entire paragraph or essay. Shifting around is cause for confusion and is regarded as an usage error. It is often marked as *tense shift*. Such an error is easy to make but also easy to correct with a careful proofreading. Just monitor the first verbs in the sentences and see if they agree in tense.

### Subordination of ideas

The topic sentence in a paragraph typically makes a statement that needs support. That support comes in the rest of the paragraph via the other sentences. All sentences in the paragraph should be subordinate to the main idea expressed in the topic sentence. Two general organizational patterns are acceptable. The first is that all sentences are equally balanced sub-points. For instance, each sentence may contain a different example that supports the topic sentence. The second method is that each sentence that makes a sub-point also has a sentence which follows that further elaborates on that particular sub-point. In essence a second level of subordination in the paragraph exists. Both methods are given in outline form below. Note that each sentence on a given level should have a rough equality in importance to other sentences on that level.

#### Pattern #1

Topic sentence  
sub-point 1  
sub-point 2  
sub-point 3  
sub-point 4  
conclusion

#### Pattern #2

Topic sentence  
sub-point 1  
elaboration  
sub-point 2  
elaboration  
conclusion

## CONTINUITY IN WRITING

One problem found in student writing, particularly that of younger students, is the lack of continuity. By that I mean the sentences do not flow well together; they don't tie well to one another.

The difficulty for the reader is to put it together in a reasonable fashion. This should not be the reader's job; it is the job of the writer to make an organized presentation. In fact, the better the organization, the more able the reader is absorb the content, which is generally the writer's purpose.

Many people often write as they think; this is especially true with younger children. The problem is that thoughts are often scattered instead of logically ordered. I remember my mother saying to me numerous times, "What has that got to do with the price of tea in China?" Of course, she was telling me in her elliptical fashion that my most recent statement had no relation to what I had previously said.

So, how do you know if you have a logical progression of thought in your writing? I maintain you can see it through the structure of the writing. Below you will find a series of ideas that are simple and can be easily followed by all students. I'm only making one assumption, that the students can recognize a noun when they see it. That's pretty basic, and almost all students can do so.

What follows will be obvious when I explain it. Unfortunately, many times the obvious is not taught; instead it is assumed. That's a common problem with teaching. Experience has shown me that explaining the obvious pays big dividends. Not all students know the things their teachers assume they know.

The key to having continuity in writing is repetition. Something from the previous sentence needs to be repeated in some fashion. Here are a few of the obvious ways of making reference from one sentence to another.

First all writing must begin somewhere. Thus, the first sentence will make some statement about something. A general idea or a main idea will be identified. Subsequent sentences will build on or explain this idea in some way. Therefore, those subsequent sentences need ties to previous sentences. Here's how it works.

1. The easiest method is to simply repeat the subject. Two successive sentences share the same subject.

Joe went to town. Joe met Sally.

In the above, we have *Joe* as the subject. First he goes to town, a simple action. Then he meets Sally, another simple action, but we have moved the writing forward and kept our continuity.

2. The second method, and one which is really a variant on the first, is to repeat the subject but use a pronoun reference instead of repeating the actual noun. This lends variety and efficiency to the writing.

Joe went to town. He met Sally.

3. A third variant would be to repeat the subject but use a synonym instead of the original noun. Not all subjects lend themselves to this method, but enough do so that it can be used rather often.

Joe and his brothers went to town. The boys met Sally.

4. Thus far, we have kept our repetition to the subject, but things wouldn't get very far were we to stay on that tack. The fourth method, not a variant of the others, is to repeat one of the other nouns from the previous sentence.

Joe went to town. Going to town was a major event.

Obviously in the above *town* is repeated. I am using very simple sentences. Think of all the possibilities in the following sentence.

Joe met Sally on his way to town after the ball game on Saturday.

Look at all the nouns in the above sentence. Any one of them could be repeated. Of course, each noun would probably move the discourse in a new direction. Picking *Sally* instead of *ball game* as the new subject would certainly shift the emphasis.

5. This is a variant on the previous method. Instead of repeating the noun as a noun, use a pronoun.

Joe went to town. It was the only place to get supplies.

6. The sixth method is to substitute a pronoun for a summary of some part of the previous sentence.

Joe went to town. It was an all day affair.

Here we see that the second sentence is referring to the whole idea of Joe going to town.

You will note that all substitutions or references in the second sentence thus far are in the subject position. This is the logical place for the repeated or referenced item to appear since it becomes the focus of attention for the new sentence. Other possibilities exist.

7. The seventh method requires the repetition of some other part of the sentence, usually the predicate, often with a noun in it.

Joe went to town. We also went to town.

Joe ran around the house. We ran around the garage.

In the above we have the actions being repeated, either directly or in a slightly different manner.

Joe ran over to the slide. We walked over to the swings.

Here we see the action being contrasted. It is still a repetition of structure; it mimics the action but does it with different words.

8. The eighth method is use transitional words such as *first*, *next*, *then*, and others like them. This method is usually found when explaining a process.

First go outside. Then look up in the sky.

Of course, as some of you would rightly point out, the above example has the same subject for both sentences. It just isn't stated, but *you* is understood as the subject.

## CONTINUITY EXERCISES

DIRECTIONS: Write a second sentence following the directions given. Your sentences must tie in to the sentence given previous to the instruction.

John brought home a rose for his mother.

1. repeat the subject
2. repeat the subject as a pronoun
3. repeat *home* as the new subject
4. repeat *rose* as the new subject
5. repeat *mother* as the new subject
6. use mother as the new subject but as a pronoun

My dog likes to chase rabbits in the field by our house.

7. use a synonym of *dog* for the subject
8. repeat *rabbits* as the new subject
9. repeat *field* as the new subject
10. repeat *house* as the new subject

Alfred drove the bus to the local church.

11. repeat the subject
12. repeat the subject as a pronoun
13. use a transitional word and use *children* as the new subject
14. use *bus* as the new subject
15. use *church* as the new subject
16. repeat a part of the predicate with a new subject
17. use a repetition of action in some way
18. use a summary of part of the sentence

## PARAGRAPH PARAMETER CHECKS

An analytical key such as those in the back of the book or something like them will be developed by your teacher and used as a check sheet for your paragraphs. I suggest writing about something you are currently studying in Bible, science, history, or literature. Of course, your teacher may pick your topics for you. If not, you can pick your own topics, but it is good to write about what you are learning in other subjects since it helps you to both digest and retain the information. In effect, it helps your study in your other courses. It goes without saying that the subjects you do write upon should be in good taste and should reflect your best efforts. Last minute efforts and improper or inane subject material are examples of shoddy craftsmanship and are not acceptable. Do your best.

Be careful of mechanics. If there are too many problems in that area, it detracts greatly from your writing and leaves a bad impression on the reader. According to the check sheets in the back, poor mechanics can cost you up to a full grade.

After you have written your paragraph, it is best to let it rest a day or two if you have the time; then proofread it for mistakes. You should even read it out loud; that helps to catch certain errors. Be sure to read what you have actually written, not just what you want it to say. The advantage of the time delay between writing and proof reading is that you will be more inclined to read it as it is instead of reading into it what you want since it is not as fresh in your mind as when you had just written it. If possible, it is to your advantage to have someone else read your paragraph and make comment. He/she is limited to what you have written and will read the piece for what it actually says. You should reciprocate by reading the other person's work if he/she is a fellow student.

Please note that the check sheets have four basic areas: organization, mechanics, style, and content. Each one of these areas contributes to or detracts from your overall grade. The purpose of the check sheet is to give you and your teacher specific information regarding your strengths and weaknesses. This allows you to concentrate on improving the areas that need work. In fact, you might construct a grid upon which you can place the numbers or marks from each check sheet. Over time this will allow you and your teacher to see a pattern in your errors. That will then further help your concentration on those areas of identified weaknesses.

Pay particular attention to whatever specifics are given on any particular assignment. Those specifics often make or break a paragraph. Good writing requires some attention to detail. You have been forewarned.

Pay attention to what the teacher has marked on the check sheets and any remarks in the comment section. Your performance in the various areas determines your final grade. Most of the areas are fairly cut and dried; that is, you either did or did not perform the task. A few do call for some judgment on the part of the teacher. As a student, you will have to determine what the teacher's preferences are and adjust accordingly. Each teacher is somewhat different. Those sections, however, should not count for more than a single step in the final grade.

You will find parameter check sheets for all of your writing. They will change to include other items as the writing assignments become longer and more complicated. The check sheets will also provide you and your teacher a common ground for discussing your writing.

Now just an advance note of warning. The first two formats seem to be alike, but they are not. The example format asks for examples. If the topic were pickup trucks, the examples might be Ford, Toyota, Datsun, and Dodge. The classification model says to put the pickup in a series of categories: manufacturers, typical users, the various sizes of pickups, and perhaps the uses of a pickup. This model is not a rehash of examples.



## THE EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH

The example paragraph is used to provide a better understanding of a subject by seeing various examples of it. The subjects can vary from physical objects to concepts. Horses, chairs, honesty, and dictatorships could all be topics of an example paragraph.

### BASIC REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) All examples should be relevant to the subject.
- 2) The examples should be familiar to most people.

### OTHER ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE:

- 1) Be sure the examples are clear and appropriate to your point.
- 2) Look for a natural order if any among your examples.
- 3) For each example, provide some extra information in the sentence.
- 4) Avoid complicated subjects for a single paragraph; such topics are better suited for multi-paragraph essays.

### METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION:

- 1) pick a topic
- 2) brainstorm for examples
- 3) pick best examples; eliminate repetitions & unsuitable ideas
- 4) arrange the order of the examples
- 5) generate a topic sentence
- 6) utilize the examples in the body of the paragraph
- 7) write a concluding sentence

### WORKING IT THROUGH:

- 1) The topic will be root crops.
- 2) Here are some examples of root crops: beets, carrots, radishes, parsnips, onions, turnips, sugar beets, potatoes, and peanuts.
- 3) Let's pick beets, carrots, radishes, turnips and potatoes; they are well known and all have some different characteristics. The number of examples we need to pick is dependent on the number of sentences required in the body paragraph. Remember, we always need an introduction and conclusion as well. There are two ways we could do this paragraph. First, we could have a different example for each body sentence. Second, we could have two sentences for each example if we had enough to say about each example. We'll use the first type this time.
- 4) We need to arrange the order for these items. Perhaps it could be by size of the root; maybe it could be by popularity. Perhaps it could be length of time from planting to harvest. We should always have some logical order to our examples. For this example, let's use size of the root, and let's arrange it from smallest to largest. The probable order would radish, carrot, beet, turnip, and potato. We are talking average size here.
- 5) Now we need to generate a topic sentence, something about roots in general and hopefully something that reflects our order of arrangement. Root crops, which are found in most home gardens, vary in size and use.
- 6) We need to write a sentence about each root in the order we have placed them. See the example.
- 7) The concluding sentence should make some summary or motivational statement about our subject.

# FORMAT WRITING

What John Saxon did for math,  
Frode Jensen does for English.

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