

# Cohesive Writing

## Unit 1 – Paragraph Structure

### INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

# Unit 1 PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

## OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

After you have completed this unit, we hope you will be able to:

recognise how the paragraphs in a whole text are written to show the writer's focus and the way that the whole text is structured

develop a logical structure of ideas and information in your own writing

## INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT

In this module, we will examine elements of academic writing that contribute to making a piece of writing cohesive. When you are writing assignments at university the way that you link your ideas logically through your text is by a combination of grammatical and vocabulary systems. Each unit of this module will investigate aspects of a system and explain how to develop skills in applying these to your own writing.

### 1. "THEME" PATTERNS ACROSS THE WHOLE TEXT

Paragraphs are important elements in the **scaffolding** of longer texts that you have to write at university. In the first two units of this module, we will be looking at the way that writers of academic texts focus on **themes** in their writing, which help to show what meanings they consider to be most important. By signalling the focus of a text in this way, the writer lets the reader know what direction the piece of writing is going in, so that the reader should be able to predict what is going to come next. If the pattern is broken, the reader will become confused, and the text will lack coherence.

The **themes** in a text are the beginning points. For example, the introduction is the beginning point for the whole text, and so we refer to it as the **macro-Theme**. Then, each paragraph in the whole text has its own beginning, which we will refer to as the **hyper-Themes**.

### macro-Theme to whole text

INTRODUCTION

### hyper-Theme 1

FIRST PARAGRAPH

### hyper-Theme 2

SECOND PARAGRAPH

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

### Example 1

The following example comes from an essay in Nursing. The essay introduction acts as the macro-Theme for the whole essay by stating what the essay is going to be about. The essay topic was "*Future Directions in Nursing Care of Intellectually Handicapped People*". Notice the way that the three areas introduced in the macro-Theme are picked up at the beginning of the later paragraphs (as the hyper-Themes).

<p>...I will look at a series of possibilities that may occur with greater or less probability in mental health services, particularly the nursing care of intellectually disabled people. I will discuss three overlapping areas: general directions of nursing; directions for psychiatric nurses; and those directions involving intellectually disabled people.</p>	<p><b>from the Introduction to the essay</b></p> <p><b>(THREE AREAS introduced)</b></p>
<p>One of the areas of nursing that is growing and needs to grow is in the care of people who are unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors. This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing technology available to those disorders, and the population changes...</p>	<p><b>from introduction to Paragraph 3</b></p> <p><b>(FIRST AREA)</b></p>
<p>If nursing of mentally ill people is to remain an integral part of the nursing profession, it will need to follow the developments apparent in general nursing. First and foremost, education will need to be of a tertiary nature. I regret that in Western Australia education of psychiatric nurses has been in-service hospital training...</p>	<p><b>from introduction to Paragraph 8</b></p> <p><b>(SECOND AREA)</b></p>
<p>I will now turn to the area of greatest importance - the provision of services for intellectually disabled people. Since 1977 there have been ten major government reports in Australia on services for people who are intellectually disabled. All states have produced at least one, no State has fully implemented the recommendations, some have made no changes at all to date...</p>	<p><b>from introduction to Paragraph 12</b></p> <p><b>(THIRD AREA)</b></p>

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

### Example 2

The following example comes from an essay in Sociology. Once again you can see the pattern in the way that the introduction warns you about what is coming up. The essay was written in response to this essay question: "*What can the concept of culture contribute to our understanding of society?*" As you read the section from the introduction, you can easily predict what the rest of the essay is going to be about. Notice also the way that the conclusion paragraph brings all these ideas together.

<p>The concept of culture can contribute to our understanding of how social order is maintained in a society. With the concept of culture, one can better understand that the behaviour of a society is learned. It can give insight into why there are so many different societies operating in different ways, or the other hand, why societies are so similar.</p>	<p><b>Introduction to the essay</b></p> <p><b>(several ways that culture helps us to understand society)</b></p>
<p>The concept of culture further brings an understanding of why the learned behaviours are reproduced as they are. ....</p>	<p><b>from Paragraph 6 (first way)</b></p>
<p>Culture can give insight into why there are so many different societies operating in different ways .....</p>	<p><b>from Paragraph 7 (second way)</b></p>
<p>Cultural universals, practices found in every culture, are numerous, and although they vary throughout different societies they help to explain that there are similar behaviour requirements if a society is to exist. ....</p>	<p><b>from Paragraph 9 (third way)</b></p>
<p>By looking at a society's culture, one can gain an insight into how social order is maintained, why people behave the way they do, and how a society seeks to control and understand, bring meaning to and organise the world around them....</p>	<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

### Example 3: A poor essay without a good "thematic" structure

This essay was in answer to the same Sociology question as the one in Example 2 above. When you read its introduction and its paragraph beginnings, you can see that at least the beginning of this essay is spent on just trying to define culture. Even more importantly, there do not seem to be any answers to the essay question about how we can understand society better through an understanding of culture. In fact, almost the entire essay is spent in trying to define culture, so that it simply doesn't answer the question.

Culture is a term used by social scientists for a people's whole way of life. In everyday conversation the word culture may refer to activities in such areas as art, literature, and music. But to a social scientist, a people's culture consists of all the ideas, objects and ways of doing things created by the group. Culture includes arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and traditions. A culture is any way of life, simple or complex.	<b>Introduction to the essay</b>  <b>(definitions of culture)</b>
The Oxford Dictionary 1893 defined culture as "the civilization of a people (especially at a certain stage of its development in history)."	<b>from Paragraph 4</b> <b>(dictionary definition)</b>
By 1936 Webster had devised a more scientific meaning for culture "the complex of distinctive attainments, beliefs, traditions, etc. constituting the background of a racial, religious or social group, as a nation with many cultures".	<b>from Paragraph 5</b> <b>(another definition)</b>
Hollsteiner relates culture to a biological organism, in that each of its parts is related in some way to all other parts.	<b>from Paragraph 7</b> <b>(definition through analogy)</b>

It is clear that this essay is not answering the question "*What can the concept culture contribute to our understanding of society?*" Instead, each paragraph begins a new point about what culture is, without showing how it might help us understand society. The "Theme" patterns in this essay (its introduction, and its paragraph beginnings) make it clear that the essay does not answer the question.

If you think this may be one of your problem areas in your writing, then you should refer to the *Essay Module* in this series, in particular Unit 2.

**2. "THEME" PATTERNS WITHIN PARAGRAPHS**

Just as the whole text or essay has a structure which you can see in the introduction, the paragraph beginnings, and the conclusion, there is a similar structural pattern within each paragraph of beginning, middle, and end.

**ESSAY STRUCTURE**

Essay introduction Essay introduction Essay introduction Essay introduction
First paragraph beginning ..... ..... .....
Second paragraph beginning ..... ..... .....
Third paragraph beginning ..... ..... .....
etc.etc.
Essay conclusion Essay conclusion Essay conclusion Essay conclusion

**PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE**

Paragraph beginning Paragraph middle ..... ..... ..... Paragraph end
--

**Example 4: An example of a well-structured paragraph**

The table on the next page sets out the logical structure of an example paragraph. This is from the sociology essay that we looked at in Example 2 on page 4 of this unit. Remember the way that the introduction paragraph introduced us to the way that the essay was going to be structured:

<b>Essay introduction:</b> The concept of culture can contribute to our understanding of how social order is maintained in a society. With the concept of culture, one can better understand that the behaviour of a society is learned. It can give insight into why there are so many different societies operating in different ways, or the other hand, <b>why societies are so similar.</b>
---

The last part of this introduction (presented in bold) prepares us to find out, at some time in the essay, about why societies are similar. As we saw on page 4, this point is taken up in the ninth paragraph in the essay, which begins with a sentence that focusses our attention on the point:

<b>Paragraph 9 beginning:</b> Cultural universals, practices found in every culture, are numerous, and although they vary throughout different
---

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

societies they help to explain that there are similar behaviour requirements if a society is to exist.

The rest of paragraph 9 deals with this point by using different ways of elaborating on it:

<b>Paragraph 9 structure</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>The Paragraph itself</b>
<b>Beginning</b> (hyper-Theme)	Developing notion of why societies are similar	<i><b>Cultural universals</b>, practices found in every culture, are numerous, and although they vary throughout different societies they help to explain that there are similar behaviour requirements if a society is to exist.</i>
<b>Middle</b>	Developing the beginning by giving an example  Developing the beginning by explaining the relevance of culture to understanding society, using source material to substantiate claims	<b>For example every society</b> has such things as bodily adornment, education, family incest taboos, music, religious ritual, trade, language and many more ( <b>Robertson, 1987:72</b> ).  <b>Hallinan</b> claims that with a proper understanding of culture, one can see that the basic behavioural requirements of all societies are essentially the same - using technology, forming co-operative relations and communicating symbolically through language ( <b>1984:77</b> ).
<b>End</b>	Providing a rationale for why behaviour patterns in societies are the same, using a speculative approach	<b>If culture</b> is suddenly taken away from a society then that society will undoubtedly fall apart.

The end of the paragraph has two main functions: to conclude the paragraph, and to point forward to what the next paragraph might be about. Paragraph 10 is about "why a society may disintegrate or change", and so it comes as no great surprise now because it has already been suggested at the end of paragraph 9.

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

### Exercise 1

Read the following paragraph and decide whether it is well structured by analysing whether its beginning sets out the structure for the rest of the paragraph. Put marks in the paragraph to show:

- i) the beginning
- ii) the sections of the middle
- iii) the end

*Over the past 30 years, research in the health arena has attracted psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists. The focus of psychological research in this area is concerned with individual motives, attitudes and beliefs in relation to both health and illness. Anthropological studies, however, are concerned with culture and health care. Such studies concentrate on a conception of disease as a cultural product and on the way social and cultural life in the past affect beliefs about health and illness. In sociological studies the emphasis is similar, but focussed more on social relations within a particular social structure with respect to medical care.*

### Exercise 2

Fill in the gaps in the following two paragraphs to highlight how the paragraph is structured:

*Poverty occurs when requirements for basic living are not met. Two types of poverty can be seen in the world today, absolute and relative. \_\_\_\_\_ is generally restricted to the Third World where basic life essentials are lacking. These life essentials are food, fuel and shelter. The existence of \_\_\_\_\_ is determined by comparison with the normal standard of living of a society. In Australian society, for example, relative poverty exists as shown in the statistics for child poverty. Both types of \_\_\_\_\_ are problems for the government and people of the country.*

### Exercise 3

Here is a paragraph from a student's essay in economics. However, the paragraph beginning has been omitted. Read the paragraph carefully, and then write a suitable beginning to the paragraph.

*The first GDP measurement is the 'income received method', whereby the income received by the owners of productive resources is found by adding the wages, rent, interest and profit earned at each stage of production. The second means of measurement, 'the production method' can be found using either the 'final product' or the 'value added', thus providing a figure for 'value of production'. The third measurement, the 'expenditure method' simply measures the amount spent buying finished goods.*

### Exercise 4

The following text is a piece of student writing commenting on the political system of Pakistan. It is divided into seven sentences but they are in the wrong order. Read the sentences thoroughly to determine which one is the hyper-Theme and then which order the remaining sentences should be in. Then rewrite the paragraph below, and check it carefully to make sure it has a logical structure before you check with the original in the answer key.

- a) *Another reason has been the lack of strong political parties.*



## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

- b) *While it is necessary to recognise that these are not the only factors determining the failure of a democratic system they stand as the most prominent reasons.*
- c) *The first is that none of the leaders of the government, which has been based on a Western democratic constitutional system, has attempted to rule the country in a democratic way.*
- d) *It can be argued that a Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons.*
- e) *Instead they have instituted autocratic rule.*
- f) *General Mirza (1980:19) claims that "Pakistan's illiterate people are neither interested nor competent in politics".*
- g) *As a result, when constitutional crises have arisen there has not been sufficient popular support behind any one party to overcome the situation.*

### Exercise 5

Read the following paragraphs which all come from essays or reports written by students. Identify problems with the paragraph by answering these questions:

Is the hyper-Theme stated clearly?

Is there an apparent relationship between the hyper-Theme and the themes within the paragraph?

Has a focus been maintained?

How could you go about improving the paragraphs?

When you finish, check the notes in the answer key.

- a) *Nowadays ground water is polluted by industrial and agricultural works. Therefore, drinking tap water can lead to long term health problems. Further there is no guarantee regarding the safety and transportation of toxic chemicals and nuclear wastes. As a result, the potential for nuclear war is the major problem in the society.*

Problems:

- b) *In economic terms underdeveloped countries or developing countries are defined as countries which have not yet reached that stage of economic development characterised by the growth of industrialisation and level of national income sufficient to yield the consumption and domestic savings required to finance the investment necessary for further growth which is needed to cope with the demand of an increased population.*

Problems:

- c) *The Chinese population in this country is becoming significant. According to a paper from the Department of Community Services and Health (1990), in 1988 the Chinese population was one of the largest ethnic groups. It was ranked fifth in size behind the German, Italian, Greek and Dutch communities. Population projections indicate that the Chinese population will continue to increase more rapidly than most other major groups. They will represent 5.5% of the population by 2030 if the migration levels of recent years are maintained. Evidence is also available that shows about 45% of the*

## **INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES**

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

*Chinese population, their proficiency of English is classified as "not at all" or "not well" (ABS 1986). In addition to the vast differences in cultural characteristics between Chinese and Anglo-Celtics, it is urgent to look at their behaviour on using medical services.*

Problems:

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

# ANSWER KEY FOR COHESIVE WRITING MODULE UNIT 1 Paragraph Structure

## Exercise 1

**Hyper-Theme (paragraph introduction)** *Over the past 30 years, research in the health arena has attracted psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists.* **(three groups)**

**Paragraph middle (first group)** *The focus of psychological research in this area is concerned with individual motives, attitudes and beliefs in relation to both health and illness.*

**Paragraph middle (second group)** *Anthropological studies, however, are concerned with culture and health care. Such studies concentrate on a conception of disease as a cultural product and on the way social and cultural life in the past affect beliefs about health and illness.*

**Paragraph middle (third group)** *In sociological studies the emphasis is similar, but focussed more on social relations within a particular social structure with respect to medical care.*

This is a well-structured paragraph with very clear "theme" patterns. However, this analysis shows that this particular paragraph doesn't have an "end" section, perhaps because the next paragraph which follows may pick up these three groups, and so there is nothing to say to end it yet.

## Exercise 2

*Poverty occurs when requirements for basic living are not met. Two types of poverty can be seen in the world today, absolute and relative. **Absolute poverty** is generally restricted to the Third World where basic life essentials are lacking. These life essentials are food, fuel and shelter. The existence of **relative poverty** is determined by comparison with the normal standard of living of a society. In Australian society, for example, relative poverty exists as shown in the statistics for child poverty. **Both types of poverty** are problems for the government and people of the country.*

## Exercise 3

The original beginning to this paragraph is shown in bold:

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is measured in three ways.** *The first GDP measurement is the 'income received method', whereby the income received by the owners of productive resources is found by adding the wages, rent, interest and profit earned at each stage of production. The second means of measurement, 'the production method' can be found using either the 'final product' or the 'value added', thus providing a figure for 'value of production'. The third measurement, the 'expenditure method' simply measures the amount spent buying finished goods.*

## Exercise 4

The original sequence for these sentences was:

- d) *It can be argued that a Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons.*
- c) *The first is that none of the leaders of the government, which has been based on a Western democratic constitutional system, has attempted to rule the country in a democratic way.*
- e) *Instead they have instituted autocratic rule.*
- a) *Another reason has been the lack of strong political parties.*
- g) *As a result, when constitutional crises have arisen there has not been sufficient popular support behind any one party to overcome the situation.*

## **INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES**

© Learning Centre, The University of Sydney

*This unit may be copied for individual student use*

- f) *General Mirza (1980:19) claims that "Pakistan's illiterate people are neither interested nor competent in politics".*
- b) *While it is necessary to recognise that these are not the only factors determining the failure of a democratic system they stand as the most prominent reasons.*