

# Qualities of a Clear Paragraph

I. Unity

II. Development

III. Coherence

# I. Unity

## Nucleus of good writing

- Keeps paragraph from wandering
- Satisfies reader's subconscious need for order
- Gives reader confidence he's in hands of careful writer

# Unity's Identity

$$1I = 1P,$$

where ***P*** represents a  
paragraph  
and ***I*** represents an idea.

# Achieving Unity

- Choose a topic sentence
- Every sentence must support the topic sentence

# Unity is not always easy . . .

Sometimes ideas *relate to* rather than *support* the topic sentence

Economic *growth* accelerated in May.

- » Housing starts *up*
- » Income *up*
- » Land values *up*
- » Exports *up*
- » Industrial production *down*

# Accommodate Contrary Material

- Subordinate idea
  - *Although industrial production declined*, other sectors of the economy performed well.
- Broaden topic sentence
  - *Most data* suggest that economic growth was strong in May.
- Weasel words
  - Economic growth was *generally* strong in May.

# Unity Rules of Thumb

- One paragraph = one idea
- Each sentence contributes

*Digressions—no matter how interesting—  
don't belong in a unified paragraph*

# Unity Exercise

The current fiscal year is likely to see a budget deficit—not counting Treasury or other market financing of off-budget programs—of almost \$200 billion, or about 6.5 percent of GNP. Forecasts of future years necessarily entail judgments about Congressional action yet to be taken as well as economic factors. Should Congress fail to implement the expenditure restraints as well as the revenue increases contemplated in the recent budget resolution—and doubt has been expressed on that point within the Congress itself—deficits appear likely to remain close to \$200 billion for several years, even taking



*(continued)*

account of economic growth at the higher rates now projected. The hard fact remains that, as economic growth generates income and revenues to reduce the cyclical element in the deficit, the underlying or structural position of the budget will deteriorate without greater effort to reduced spending or increase revenues from that incorporated in existing programs. We would be left with the prospect that federal financing would absorb through and beyond mid-decade a portion of our savings potential without precedent during a period of economic growth.

# Volcker's Ideas

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## Volker's Ideas *(continued)*

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THE END

# Achieving Development

- Introduce ideas with:
  - General statements
  - Specific statements
- Convince with:
  - Details
  - Examples

# General Statements

- Attitudes and opinions
  - NAFTA is more equitable than the old system of tariffs and trade barriers.
- Generalizations
  - Liberalizing trade through the WTO will require a huge effort by all participating countries.

# Specific Statements

## Subtopics of general statements

- General: Liberalizing trade through the WTO will require a huge effort by all participating countries.
- Specific: The US and EU nations will have to come to agreement on two critical agricultural subsidies.

# Details . . .

. . . lend credibility because facts can be checked.

- From 1998 to 2004, US subsidies on grain commodities increased 18 percent while EU subsidies jumped nearly 30 percent.

# Examples . . .

. . . turn abstract ideas into concrete images so they can be easily understood and remembered.

- Specific: Just-in-time manufacturing works best when all key elements in the supply chain are closely linked.
- Example: Harley-Davidson, for example, keeps lead times short by requiring that suppliers be within eight hours of their assembly plants.



# Development Rules of Thumb

- Satisfy the reader's curiosity
  - When in doubt, prove

*Make sure the paragraph has all its parts*

# Development Exercise

As long as the EU market remains open to outsiders, the increased uniformity of member nations will benefit U.S. firms. Removing the physical and technical barriers has reduced the cost of doing business with Europeans. U.S. firms can benefit from their experience in highly competitive markets. To take full advantage of the integrated EU market, however, some firms must change the way they operate in Europe.

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# III. Coherence

A good paragraph is readable,  
understandable, memorable

*In expository writing, coherence makes  
the difference between chaos and order.*

# E.B. White

- Choose a suitable design and hold to it
- Design is shaped by a controlling idea

# White's Coherence

## *Design*

- Define an idea, describe a method, give a chronology of events, explain a relationship, etc.

## *Controlling idea*

- Universal writing principle—article-thesis, section-purpose, paragraph-topic sentence

# Topic Sentence

- Short
- Precise
- Clear
- First sentence

# Strong vs. Weak TS

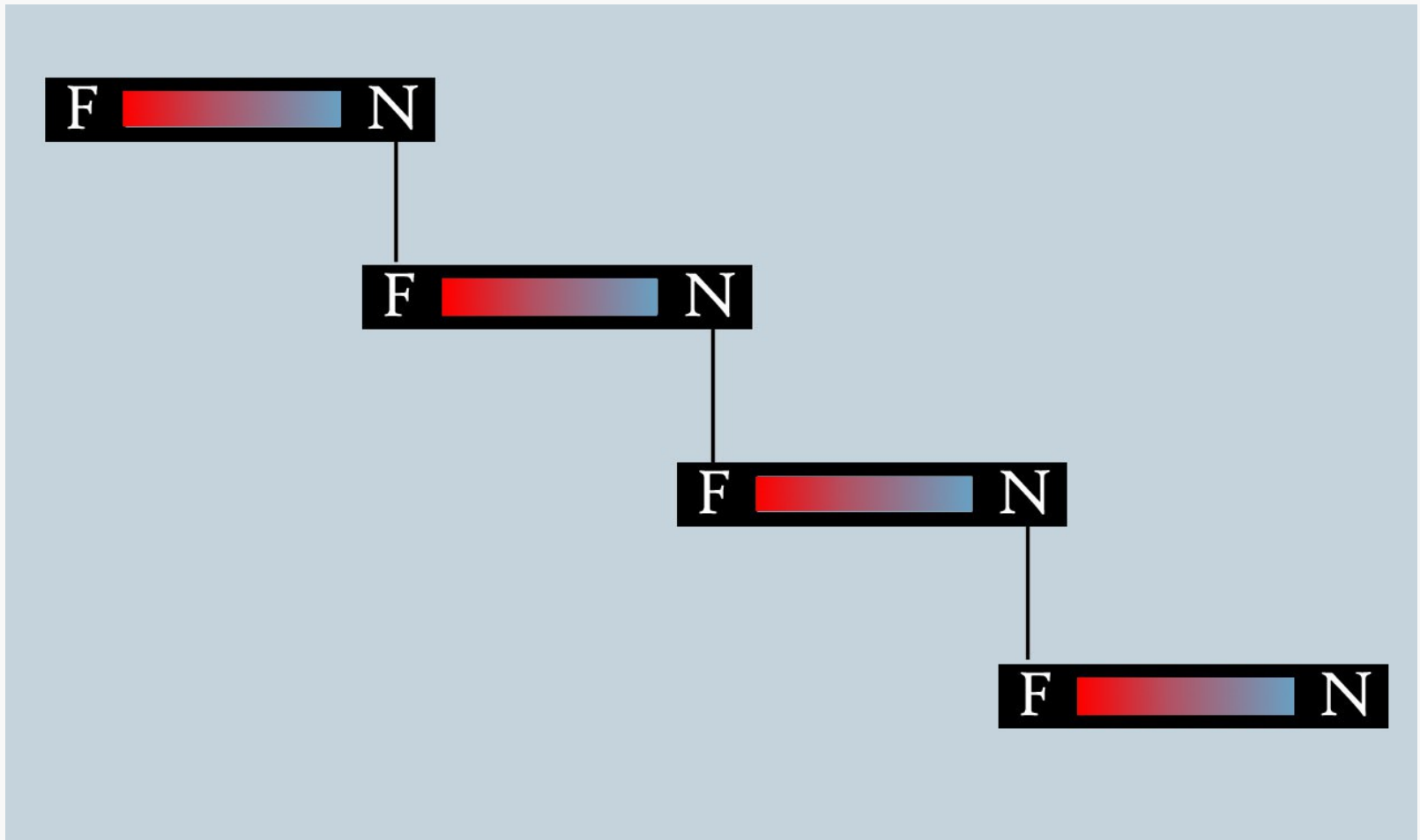
- Weak: Reader knows issue
  - I'm going to write about a cow.
- Strong: Reader knows your attitude
  - Cows are beautiful animals.



# Procession of Ideas

- A familiar idea leads to a new idea in the first sentence.
- In the second sentence that new idea then becomes the familiar idea. . .
- . . . which leads to another new idea . . .
- . . . which then becomes the familiar idea in the third sentence . . .
- . . . and so on.

# Procession of Ideas



In 2009, agricultural sales plunged, both at home and abroad.

Domestic sales fell 20 percent,  
led by much slower activity at restaurants.

High-end, white table cloth restaurants  
suffered the most due to falling incomes.

Exports also fell by a third,  
by falling demand in developing countries.

Consumers in China, for example, slashed  
spending on higher-priced protein foods.



# Transitions: Relationship

Similarly, in the same way, equally

And, in addition, further, moreover

At the same time

# Transitions: Differences

But, however

While, although, still

In contrast, nevertheless

# Transitions: Causality

As a result

Consequently

Thus, therefore

# Transitions: Development

For example

In particular

In fact

Specifically

# Transitions: Recap

In short

In sum

In other words

That is

Put simply



# Achieving Coherence

- Memorable topic sentence
- Paragraph is a procession of ideas
- Ideas linked with transitions
- Nonessential ideas near beginning of sentence

# Nonessential Ideas

- Since 2009
- During the period
- In July and August
- As shown earlier

# Coherence Rules of Thumb

- Start with a memorable topic sentence
  - Build a natural procession of ideas

*Make sure the reader always knows  
where he is going and why*

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