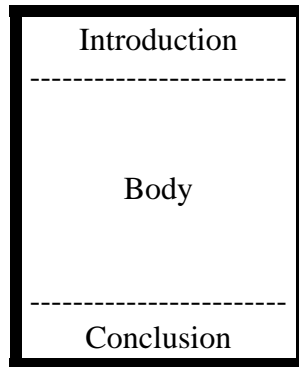


THE PARAGRAPH

As “The Ministerial Three” suggests, one of the best ways to complete the paragraph is with a concluding sentence that refers to the controlling idea expressed in the topic sentence.



Look at this paragraph as an example:

INTRODUCTION

Although the New Testament writers used the popular language of their day, they often achieved great dignity and eloquence. Convinced of the greatness of their message, they often wrote naturally and directly, as earnest men might speak to their friends. Although St. Mark’s writing was not necessarily polished,

BODY

he wrote with singular vigor and economy. St. John struggled with the language until he produced sparse and unadorned prose of great beauty. St. Paul, at his best, reached heights of eloquence which some consider unsurpassed in literature. St. Luke, the most brilliant of the New Testament writers, gave us Jesus’ Parable of the

CONCLUSION

Prodigal Son. Taken as a whole, the work of these great Christian writers of the first century has a dignity and splendor all its own.

Do you see how the underlined concluding sentence refers to and echoes the controlling idea of the topic sentence?

NOTE: The conclusion doesn’t simply repeat the topic sentence word for word: it restates the controlling idea. A paragraph that just stops is incomplete, like a church without a steeple. That final sentence, by summarizing the discussion and reemphasizing the controlling idea, gives the paragraph unity and completeness. There is one thing, however, which the conclusion may not do: it may not add new material. The building of the complete paragraph is the main subject of this whole text: the three elements of topic sentence, body, and conclusion are the basic structure.

COHERENCE

Make sure that your sentences follow an orderly sequence so that the reader can follow your development of the controlling idea. The reader must be able to see that the sentences link together in a logical pattern to make a connected whole. You might, for example, use time order (first to last) in telling a story, space order (left to right, etc.) in describing a place, comparison or contrast in illustrating a point, or climactic order (the order of importance) in arranging a series of facts to prove your point. You cannot expect your reader to understand you if your sentences are not in some kind of logical order. Notice that when even simple time order is not followed, the reader is confused:

My day yesterday was a mess. I hope I don't have such a frustrating day soon again. Feeling there was nothing else to do, I flung myself on my bed--which immediately collapsed. My fan belt broke when I was on my way to work. The baby sitter was sick, so we couldn't go to the movie. Because I was upset, I burned the steak I had splurged on. We got off to a bad start because I had forgotten to buy coffee. When I finally got to work, I found the interesting project I'd been working on was canceled, and I spent the whole day doing boring filing. I hope I don't have such a frustrating day again soon. My husband forgot I didn't have a car, so he failed to pick me up after work. I had to take the bus.

Notice that when sentences are in order, the reader can follow easily:

My day yesterday was a mess. We got off to a bad start because I had forgotten to buy coffee. My fan belt broke when I was on my way to work. When I finally got to work, I found the interesting project I'd been working on was canceled and I spent the whole day doing boring filing. My husband forgot I didn't have a car, so he failed to pick me up after work. I had to take the bus. Because I was upset, I burned the steak I had splurged on. The baby sitter was sick, so we couldn't go to the movie. Feeling there was nothing else to do, I flung myself on my bed--which immediately collapsed. I hope I don't have such a frustrating day again soon.

ADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT

Although adequate development cannot be measured by the number of words alone, you should work to construct in-depth paragraphs. Don't just add words, but build up the paragraph through unified and detailed development of your central idea. Look at the following paragraph which states a central idea but fails to develop it adequately.

Taking the easy way out is often the way to missing out on some of life's most precious rewards. We often put off until tomorrow things that, for our own good, we ought to do today. It is often all too easy to avoid facing up to difficulties and responsibilities. Taking the easy way out seldom leads to well-being and happiness.

This paragraph is simply underdeveloped. It is undernourished and suffers from malnutrition of thought. It lacks the detailed support necessary to develop the central idea in depth.

Read the following paragraph as an example of adequate development of one central idea.

Taking the easy way out is often the way to missing out on some of life's most precious rewards. By evading the problems and difficulties of life, one may appear, for the moment at least, to make things easier for himself. In the long run, however, the easy way out may lead to dissatisfaction and regret. For example, if a shy girl takes the easy way out by avoiding the difficulty and embarrassment meeting boys, she may suffer greatly from the feeling of having missed out on life. Similarly, it is the easy way out for a shy young man to avoid making advances to a girl he likes when he fears he might be rejected. However, he may eventually suffer far greater pain in seeing someone else sharing her life and her charms. In other areas of life as well, it is often too easy to avoid facing up to difficulties and responsibilities. It is often easy, for instance, to avoid the concerted effort necessary to learn a particular skill. But if that skill is necessary for one's happiness and well-being, he may suffer throughout his whole life for having taken what was for the moment an easy way out.

Lincoln is reported to have said that a man's legs ought to be long enough to reach the ground. A paragraph ought to be long enough to reach the reader, to tell him all he needs to know in order to understand what you want him to understand about your controlling idea. The body of your paragraph must do the whole job of developing your controlling idea for the reader. Thus it will be longer than either the introduction or the conclusion. The length of the three basic paragraph parts then is a matter of proportion. It is something you can see.

So that your discussion is complete, you need a concluding sentence to pull together the group of sentences that make up the body of your paragraph.

Usually a single sentence will provide an adequate conclusion.