

UMD ARC/Writing & Reading Center

Rhetoric, Logic, and Coherence

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It involves trying to convince someone, change his or her opinion or point of view, and in essence, bring him or her around to your way of thinking. To impress your reader, you must first organize your thoughts in a logical manner by stating the intention of your paragraph or composition and then leading your reader by the hand to your conclusion.

Building a Paragraph:

1. The first paragraph of your essay should be the introduction. In this paragraph, the thesis must be included. This sentence(s) announces the main point of your essay.
2. The main point of each paragraph is stated in the topic sentence. All other sentences in the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence, building upon it as a building is constructed upon its foundation.

How does a writer structure a good topic sentence? He must first have a definite purpose or point of view. He must have a strong reason for stressing a particular aspect of his thought about a subject...The difference between a good topic sentence and a poor one is that the poor topic sentence does not have a clearly stated main idea that shows the writer's purpose or point of view. A poor topic sentence...is too limited or too broad and general to be developed into an effective paragraph.

-From Paragraphs and Themes by P. Joseph Canavan,
pp. 32-33.

3. Make your arguments clear through supportive sentences that clarify and build upon your main idea. Remember, too, that your reader will be looking at grammar, spelling, etc., so build your sentences as mechanically correctly as possible. Make sure that each sentence is clear and concise.
4. Organize your sentences and ideas in a coherent manner. There should be a logical progression of thought that your reader will be able to follow. Sentences that stray from the topic should be revised or omitted. Only those sentences that lend themselves to the topic should be used. Weaknesses in your logic or in the order of your ideas will confuse or lose the reader. There should be a smooth transition from one idea to the next.

Coherence is essentially a technique of connecting ideas smoothly and logically in written communication. In a coherent piece of writing, a writer leads his reader clearly and logically from one idea to another in his developing thought. He weaves his ideas so skillfully that the reader can see quickly the relationship of one idea to another and to the central thought (thesis) of the whole.

- Canavan, p. 67.

Building the Composition:

1. Construct sentences and paragraphs as outlined above. Keep in mind the conclusion you want to point toward. Each paragraph should deal with a particular

aspect of your overall topic.

2. Extra sentences, or even paragraphs, that are unnecessary to the function of the composition should be discarded. Wordiness does not improve papers.
3. Organize your paragraphs in a logical order. Use the topic sentence of each paragraph as a guide to your organization. (See also Writing Center handouts for outlining procedures.)
4. State your conclusion in the final paragraph. If your rhetoric and method of presentation were successful, your reader will already have mentally reached this conclusion and will be in agreement with you. Your conclusion should be a restatement of your thesis and should point to how each of your arguments collectively adds up to this idea.

Exercises

1. Organize the following sentences in a logical order. Think about why you are placing each sentence in such sequences.

- a. Not long after the factory was completed, a job interview program was begun as the factory manager started selection of a production staff.
- b. A mile outside of town, Aunt Bessie's Homemade Marmalade Company built a factory.
- c. After only a year of operation, the complex was destroyed by fire when the boiling vats exploded.
- d. It took nearly eight months to finish the new building.
- e. Upon its completion, the new building was invaded by a skeleton staff of production managers and officers.
- f. The property was sold when the company could not raise sufficient funds to repair the damage.

2. Write a brief paragraph about a hobby that you enjoy. Assume that this paragraph is self-supportive, that is, it is not part of a larger essay.

3. Answer the following questions about the paragraph below.

Millions of years ago, a volcano built a mountain on the floor of the Atlantic. In eruption after eruption it gushed up a pile of volcanic rock, until it had accumulated a mass a hundred miles across at its base, reaching with an area of 200 square miles. Thousands of years passed, and thousands of thousands. Eventually the waves of the Atlantic cut down the cone and reduced it to a shoal- all of it, that is, but a small fragment which remained above water. This fragment we know as Bermuda.

-From The Sea Around Us, by Rachel Carson

- a. Which sentence would you classify as the topic sentence? Why?
- b. In your opinion, is this paragraph progressing in an orderly and logical fashion? Why or why not?

c. Would this paragraph belong in an essay called “The People and Customs of Bermuda”? In an essay called “The Formation of an Island”?

A Final Checklist:

While writing your papers or paragraphs, ask yourself the following questions:

- a. How clear is my main idea? Is it too broad or too general? Have I expressed my main idea adequately in my topic sentence?
- b. Is each sentence/paragraph necessary to the function of this paper? Is any misleading to the reader? Are my arguments strong enough to support my conclusion?
- c. Is this paper logically ordered? Are there any “flaws” in my logic that my reader could “stumble” on? Is there a smooth transition from one idea and thought to the next?

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