

## II. PARAGRAPH.

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### PRECEPTS.

#### 1. DEFINITION AND TOPIC.

**Definition.** — A paragraph is a series of connected sentences developing one topic.

**Topic.** — The topic is a subject or proposition expressed in a sentence called the topic sentence. Usually the topic sentence is brief, and stands either in the first place or after a sentence or two of introduction; as, —

“*English travellers are the best and worst in the world. Where no motives of pride or interest intervene, none can equal them,*” etc. (See p. 77.)

“I have dwelt upon this beautiful rural custom, because as it is one of the last, so it is one of the holiest offices of love. *The grave is the ordeal of true affection.* It is there that the divine passion of the soul manifests its superiority to the instinctive impulse of mere animal attachment,” etc. (See p. 82.)

**Omission of Topic Sentence.** — Sometimes the topic is kept until the end or not stated at all. In the latter case it must be gathered from the whole paragraph. The topic of the following paragraph may be expressed thus: What Rip Van Winkle saw and thought of on waking.

On waking, he found himself on the green knoll whence he had first seen the old man of the glen. He rubbed his eyes — it

was a bright sunny morning. The birds were hopping and twittering among the bushes, and the eagle was wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze. "Surely," thought Rip, "I have not slept here all night." He recalled the occurrences before he fell asleep. The strange man with the keg of liquor—the mountain ravine—the wild retreat among the rocks—the woe-begone party at nine-pins—the flagon—"Oh! that flagon! that wicked flagon!" thought Rip—"what excuse shall I take to Dame Van Winkle?"—*Rip Van Winkle*.

The omission of the topic sentence occurs most frequently in narration, which, consisting of a series of events, cannot, as a rule, be conveniently summed up in short propositions. The omission is rarer in other kinds of writing. Compare in this respect the purely narrative portions of *Rip Van Winkle* with the sketch, *Rural Life in England*.

## 2. PRINCIPAL QUALITIES OF THE PARAGRAPH.

The principal qualities of a paragraph are unity, continuity, and proportion.

Unity, continuity, and proportion are qualities that belong to the sentence and to the whole composition as well as to the paragraph, but they are treated of here because they can be studied to better advantage in the paragraph, which is long enough to allow these qualities their full effect, yet not too long to baffle the student by the amount of matter he is required to grasp for their study.

**Unity.**—Unity excludes all thoughts not immediately connected with the topic, and prevents the undue extension of the paragraph. Such unity is felt to be present when the paragraph can be summed up in a simple sentence.

**Unity in a Narrative Paragraph.** — A narrative paragraph will have unity when it groups together the events that are closely connected in time, as in the last passage cited. In some cases, however, a series of events widely separated in time but exhibiting a common characteristic are put in one paragraph; as in the following example, where the events are grouped under the headings, "useful and agreeable."

That all this might not be too onerous on the purses of his rustic patrons, who are apt to consider the costs of schooling a grievous burden and schoolmasters as mere drones, he had various ways of rendering himself both useful and agreeable. He assisted the farmers occasionally in the lighter labors of their farms, helped to make hay, mended the fences, took the horses to water drove the cows from pasture, and cut wood for the winter fire. He laid aside, too, all the dominant dignity and absolute sway with which he lorded it in his little empire, the school, and became wonderfully gentle and ingratiating. He found favor in the eyes of the mothers by petting the children, particularly the youngest; and like the lion bold, which whilom so magnanimously the lamb did hold, he would sit with a child on one knee and rock a cradle with his foot for whole hours together. — *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.*

**Unity in a Descriptive Paragraph.** — A descriptive paragraph will have unity when it contains details closely connected in place. (See example on page 124.) In some cases, however, objects exhibiting a common trait, though not closely connected in place, are grouped together, as in the following paragraph, which describes Little Britain by selecting the details that reflect its former splendor:

But though thus fallen into decline, Little Britain still bears traces of its former splendor. There are several houses ready to tumble down, the fronts of which are magnificently enriched

with old oaken carvings of hideous faces, unknown birds, beasts, and fishes, and fruits and flowers which it would perplex a naturalist to classify. There are also, in Aldersgate Street, certain remains of what were once spacious and lordly family mansions, but which have in latter days been subdivided into several tenements. Here may often be found the family of a petty tradesman with its trumpery furniture, burrowing among the relics of antiquated finery, in great rambling time-stained apartments with fretted ceilings, gilded cornices, and enormous marble fireplaces. The lanes and courts also contain many smaller houses, not on so grand a scale, but like your small ancient gentry, sturdily maintaining their claims to equal antiquity. These have their gable ends to the street, great bow windows with diamond panes set in lead, grotesque carvings, and low arched doorways. — *Little Britain.*

**Unity in an Argumentative Paragraph.** — An argumentative paragraph will have unity when its sentences give an explanation, repetition, proof, illustration, or enforcement of the proposition in the topic sentence. Sometimes the sentences of the paragraph serve one only of these purposes; sometimes, more than one. In the following paragraph the proposition expressed in the first sentence is explained in the second sentence by enumerating the qualities that go to make up “the moral feeling.” A reason for this pervading feeling of English scenery is assigned in the third sentence. Finally, in the last long sentence, instances that illustrate the proposition are enumerated, while the predicate repeats and enforces it.

The great charm, however, of English scenery is the moral feeling that seems to pervade it. It is associated in the mind with ideas of order, of quiet, of sober well-established principles, of hoary usage and reverend custom. Everything seems to be

the growth of ages of regular and peaceful existence. The old church of remote architecture, with its low, massive portal, its Gothic tower, its windows rich with tracery and painted glass, in scrupulous preservation, its stately monuments of warriors and worthies of the olden time, ancestors of the present lords of the soil, its tombstones recording successive generations of sturdy yeomanry whose progeny still plough the same fields and kneel at the same altar; the parsonage, a quaint irregular pile, partly antiquated, but repaired and altered in the tastes of various ages and occupants; the stile and footpath leading from the churchyard, across pleasant fields, and along shady hedgerows, according to an immemorial right of way; the neighboring village, with its venerable cottages, its public green sheltered by trees, under which the forefathers of the present race have sported; the antique family mansion, standing apart in some little rural domain, but looking down with a protecting air on the surrounding scene: all these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled security, a hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation. — *Rural Life in England.*

Paragraphs of exposition and persuasion are provided for sufficiently in the precepts already given. For fuller treatment, approved text-books of rhetoric may be consulted. Exposition is usually subordinated to argument in the *Sketch Book*, and in the present work it is treated of, practically, under the heading, "Development of Paragraphs," and in the exercises.

**Continuity.** — Continuity (sequence, coherence) connects all the sentences of a paragraph one with another, showing their mutual dependence.

Continuity is of two kinds: continuity of thought, which means the proper arrangement of the ideas and sentences; and continuity of expression, which comprehends all the various devices made use of by language to connect sentences.

**Continuity of Thought.** — The general rule for continuity of thought is to place together in a paragraph whatever is connected in thought. The proper order for narrative and descriptive paragraphs will be given where they are treated of. In argumentation the usual order, subject to not a few variations, is to introduce the topic, to state it, to explain it by more specific repetition or by definition, to amplify it according to one or more of the methods of development, applying or enforcing its truth. For examples see the paragraph cited under Unity (page 49), and those given under the Development of Paragraphs (pages 67, 69).

**Continuity of Expression.** — Continuity of expression is obtained : —

1. By conjunctions and conjunctive phrases.
2. By words and phrases of reference, as *this*, *that*, *such*, *the following*, *in like manner*, etc., and by transitional statements, that is, brief summaries of what has preceded with the indication, sometimes, of what is to follow.
3. By an inversion in the order of the words or the thoughts, bringing to the first place in a sentence the idea prominent in the preceding sentence.

Often all these different devices are omitted without destroying continuity. Such an omission takes place especially when the succeeding sentence repeats, explains, or gives in detail what has been stated before, or when several successive sentences have the same general bearing.

A rule usually given in this matter is that all conjunctive particles should be dropped when the connection in thought between two sentences is either very close or very remote. Conjunctions are like sign-posts : when the thought follows the same direction, they are not needed ;

when the thought changes its direction, a conjunction should be introduced.

An example of the different ways of obtaining continuity of expression: —

In *that same* village, and in one of *these* very houses (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather-beaten), there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple good-natured fellow of the name of Rip Van Winkle. *He* was a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina. He inherited, *however*, but little of the martial character of his ancestors. *I have observed that he was a simple good-natured man*; he was, *moreover*, a kind neighbor and an obedient henpecked husband. *Indeed, to the latter circumstance* might be owing that meekness of spirit which gained him such universal popularity; for those men are apt to be obsequious and conciliating abroad who are under the discipline of shrews at home. *Their tempers, doubtless*, are rendered pliant and malleable in the fiery furnace of domestic tribulation, and a certain lecture is worth all the sermons in the world for teaching the virtues of patience and long-suffering. A termagant wife may, *therefore*, in some respects, be considered a tolerable blessing; and if so, Rip Van Winkle was thrice blessed. — *Rip Van Winkle.*

*Words of reference and inversion, making connection with the preceding paragraph.*

*Explanatory sentence.*

*Conjunction.*

*Transitional statement.*

*Conjunction.*

*Inversion, reference, and conjunctive phrase.*

*Explanatory sentence and conjunctive phrase.*

*Conjunction.*

**Proportion.** — Proportion regulates the composition of a paragraph according to the importance of the thoughts to be expressed.

It is of two kinds: proportion of space and proportion of emphasis.

**Proportion of Space.** — Proportion of space consists in giving more important ideas more space, and less important ideas less space.

In the following paragraph the squire is the important person, and he is described more at length. Farther on in the same sketch the young officer becomes a figure of prominence and receives a more detailed description.

So intent were the servants upon their sports that we had to ring repeatedly before we could make ourselves heard. On our arrival being announced, the squire came out to receive us, accompanied by his two other sons — one a young officer in the army, home on a leave of absence; the other an Oxonian, just from the university. The squire was a fine, healthy-looking old gentleman, with silver hair curling lightly round an open florid countenance, in which the physiognomist, with the advantage like myself of a previous hint or two, might discover a singular mixture of whim and benevolence. — *Christmas Eve.*

**Proportion of Emphasis.** — Proportion of emphasis, or prominence, consists in keeping the principal subject in a place of prominence throughout the paragraph, while the less important details are kept subordinate. The place of prominence is usually the beginning of the sentence.

In the following paragraph the principal subject, "chivalrous courage," is stated in the second sentence. It then takes the first and prominent place for four sen

tences, in which other details occupy subordinate positions. In the sixth sentence, to avoid the monotonous repetition of the pronoun, "it," and to introduce variety, the subject is less prominently placed. This variation, however, is shown to be subordinate by the introduction to it in the fifth and sixth sentences, and by the return to the main topic with the help of the transitional phrase, "thus artificially excited."

The natural principle of war is to do the most harm to our enemy with the least harm to ourselves; and this, of course, is to be effected by stratagem. That chivalrous courage which induces us to despise the suggestions of prudence and to rush in the face of certain danger is the offspring of society and produced by education. It is honorable, because it is in fact the triumph of lofty sentiment over an instinctive repugnance to pain, and over those yearnings after personal ease and security which society has condemned as ignoble. It is kept alive by pride and the fear of shame, and thus the dread of real evil is overcome by the superior dread of an evil which exists but in the imagination. It has been cherished and stimulated also by various means. It has been the theme of spirit-stirring song and chivalrous story. The poet and minstrel have delighted to shed round it the splendors of fiction, and even the historian has forgotten the sober gravity of narration, and broken forth into enthusiasm and rhapsody in its praise. Triumphs and gorgeous pageants have been its reward: monuments on which art has exhausted its skill, and opulence its treasures, have been erected to perpetuate a nation's gratitude and admiration. Thus artificially excited, courage has risen to an extraordinary and factitious degree of heroism; and arrayed in all the glorious "pomp and circumstance of war," this turbulent quality has even been able to eclipse many of those quiet but invaluable virtues which silently enoble the human character and swell the tide of human happiness. — *Traits of Indian Character.*