

# Flow & Unity



# Understanding Flow & Unity

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We judge the *flow* of a sequence of sentences depending on how each sentence links to the next.

We judge the *unity* of passage depending on how all its sentences relate to a common idea.



# No Flow, No Unity

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Recent research has given us surprising insights into the father's role in childrearing. My family is typical of the east side in that we never had much money. Their tongues became black and hung out of their mouths. The back-to-basics movement got a lot of press, fueled as it was by fears of growing illiteracy and cultural demise.



# Good Flow, No Unity

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Recent research has given us surprising insights into the father's role in childrearing. Childrearing is a complex process that is frequently investigated by psychologists. Psychologists have also investigated sleep patterns and dreams. When we are dreaming, psychologists have shown, we are often reviewing recent events in our lives.



# Flow & Unity

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Recent research has given us surprising insights into the father's role in childrearing. It shows that in almost all of their interactions with children, fathers do things a little differently from mothers. What fathers do—their special parenting style—is not only highly complementary to what mothers do but is by all indications important in its own right.



# Creating Flow

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Scientists have raised some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe by studying black holes in space. *The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.* So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways.



# Creating Flow

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Scientists have raised some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe by studying black holes in space. *A black hole forms when a dead star collapses into a point perhaps no larger than a marble.* So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways.



# Old / New Contract

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To Atlanta on Flight 29: Gate C12

To Dallas on Flight 35: Gate C25

To Memphis on Flight 16: Gate B20

Gate B20: Flight 16 to Memphis

Gate C12: Flight 29 to Atlanta

Gate C25: Flight 35 to Dallas



# Old / New Contract

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Begin sentences with familiar information.

End sentences with new information.



# Old / New Contract

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The old/new contract is another principle for writing clear prose. Beginning your sentences with something old—something that links to what has gone before—and then ending your sentences with new information that advances the argument is what the old/new contract asks writers to do. An effect called *flow*, which is closely related to *unity*, is created by following this principle. Whereas the relationship between topic sentence and the body of the paragraph between the parts and the whole is what *unity* refers to, the clear relationship between one sentence and the text is what *flow* relates to.



# Old / New Contract

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Another principle for writing clear prose is the old/new contract. The old/new contract asks writers to begin sentences with something old—something that links to what has gone before—and then to end sentences with new information that advances the argument. Following this principle creates an effect called *flow*, which is closely related to *unity*. Whereas *unity* refers to the clear relationship between the body of a paragraph and its topic sentence and between the parts and the whole, *flow* refers to the clear relationship between one sentence and the next, between part and part.



# Creating Unity

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Sayner, Wisconsin, is the snowmobile capital of the world. The buzzing of snowmobile engines fills the air, and their tank-like tracks crisscross the snow. The snow reminds me of Mom's mashed potatoes, covered with furrows I would draw with my fork. Her mashed potatoes usually make me sick—that's why I play with them. I like to make holes in the middle of potatoes and fill it with melted butter. This behavior had been the subject of long chats between me and my analyst.



# Creating Unity

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A paragraph will have unity when:

One sentence in the paragraph states its main point.

The Subjects of most sentences name the same Agent.



# Topic Sentence

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First, you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be enough depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, that is the next step, otherwise, you are pretty well set. Next you operate the machines according to the instructions. After you complete the procedure, you arrange the materials into different groups again. Then you can put them in their appropriate places. Eventually, you will have to repeat the whole cycle. However, that is part of life.



# Topic Sentence

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*The procedure for washing clothes is actually quite simple.* First, you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be enough depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, that is the next step, otherwise, you are pretty well set. Next you operate the machines according to the instructions. After you complete the procedure, you arrange the materials into different groups again. Then you can put them in their appropriate places. Eventually, you will have to repeat the whole cycle. However, that is part of life.



# Revising for Unity

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Put subjects that name a main character/topic in the paragraph at the start of most sentences.



# Revising for Unity

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The particular ideas toward the beginning of sentences define what a passage is “about” for a reader. Moving through a paragraph from a unified point of view is made possible by a sequence of topics that constitute a limited set of related ideas. A seeming absence of context for each sentence is one consequence of making random shifts in topics. Feelings of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus in a passage occur when this happens.



# Revising for Unity

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The particular *ideas* toward the beginning of sentences define what a passage is “about” for a reader. *Moving* through a paragraph from a unified point of view is made possible by a sequence of topics that constitute a limited set of related ideas. A seeming *absence* of context for each sentence is one consequence of making random shifts in topics. *Feelings* of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus in a passage occur when this happens.



# Revising for Unity

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The particular ideas toward the beginning of sentences define what a passage is “about” for a *reader*. Moving through a paragraph from a unified point of view is made possible by a sequence of topics that constitute a limited set of related ideas. A seeming absence of context for each sentence is one consequence of making random shifts in topics. Feeling of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus in a passage occur when this happens.



# Revising for Unity

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*Readers* look for consistent topics of sentences to tell them what a whole passage is “about.” If *they* feel that its sequence of topics focuses on a limited set of related ideas, then *they* will feel they are moving through that passage from a coherent point of view. But if *topics* seem to shift randomly, then *readers* have to begin each sentence from no unified point of view, and when that happens, *they* feel dislocated and disoriented, and the *passage* seems out of focus.



# Creating Flow & Unity

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## *Flow*

Begin sentences with familiar information.

End sentences with new information.

## *Unity*

Provide a topic sentence for each paragraph.

Begin sentences with a consistent set of characters.



The End