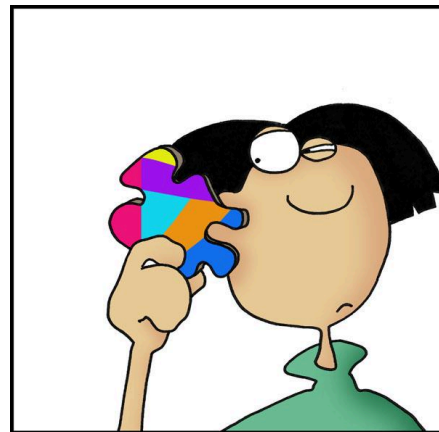


Revising for Unity

Have you ever tried mixing soda flavors? A pinch of cola here, a splash of Orange Crush there, and a dash of fruit punch to top it off.

Mixing flavors can be fun, but the final concoction rarely tastes all that great. There's too much going on. The flavors get muddled. Something doesn't belong.

A similar thing happens when you mix unrelated ideas in a paragraph. The writing lacks unity. Something doesn't belong.



Checking for Unity

A paragraph is unified when it focuses on one idea. The topic sentence states the idea, and all other sentences support it.

In the example paragraph below, the topic sentence is in **bold type**. The writer cuts an **unrelated idea**.

Percussion instruments provide rhythm and many of the interesting sounds you hear during musical performances. Percussionists make sounds by striking, shaking, or scraping their instruments. Drums, cymbals, xylophones, and maracas are examples of percussion instruments. Surprisingly, the piano is a percussion instrument, too. ~~Another keyboard instrument is the pipe organ, but sound on a pipe organ is made when air goes through pipes.~~ The percussion section in an orchestra varies in size depending on the requirements of the music.

(The writer deletes a sentence about a type of instrument that has nothing to do with the focus of the paragraph—*percussion* instruments.)

Revising Sample Paragraphs

Read each paragraph below. If every sentence supports the **topic sentence**, write “U” for “Unified.” If a paragraph lacks unity, cross out the sentence that doesn’t belong.

1. **Poison ivy is an enemy of campers and other nature lovers.** It contains an oil that irritates the skin. The oil gets onto the skin when the plant’s leaf is crushed. Walking through or on top of poison ivy can release the oil. Poison sumac is also a problem for campers. You can easily recognize poison ivy because it usually grows as a vine and has compound leaves made up of three leaflets each.
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2. **One popular winter sport is ice skating.** Ice skating is fun and inexpensive. Many community rinks charge only a small price for admission and skate rental. Not everyone is a champion, but almost anyone can enjoy skating. It just requires a little strength, some agility, and most importantly, a good sense of humor about falling.
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3. **Nerve cells are responsible for some important functions in the human body.** They conduct electrical impulses from the brain to different parts of the body. They also transport information from the sense organs to the brain. Blood cells transport oxygen through the veins to every part of the body. Without nerve cells, you wouldn’t be able to move, see, hear, feel, smell, or taste. Because nerve cells also move information around the brain, you couldn’t think without them, either.
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Revising Your Own Paragraphs

Follow these steps to revise your paragraphs for unity.

1. **Take out a complete first draft.** Ideally you will have set it aside for a day or two so you can revise with fresh eyes.
2. **Review one paragraph at a time.**
3. **Study the topic sentence.** Your topic sentence should focus on one important part or feature of a topic or on a specific feeling you have about it.
4. **Ask these questions about the remaining sentences:**
 - a. Does this sentence support the idea I introduced in the topic sentence?
 - b. Does the sentence explain or clarify a sentence that came directly before it?
5. **If you answer “no” to both questions, take one of these actions:**
 - a. **Rewrite** the sentence so that it clearly supports the topic sentence or clarifies the sentence before it.
 - b. **Cut** the sentence from the paragraph; **add** a new sentence if you need more support or clarification.
 - c. **Move** the sentence to a new paragraph. (Ask yourself, “Would this sentence work better somewhere else?”)

Inside Writing

Cutting sentences or entire paragraphs can feel painful. After all, you worked hard on that writing and feel close to the ideas! Sometimes, though, cutting a favorite part is exactly what needs to happen to make the writing more unified. And if you’re truly tied to the idea, move it to a separate page and save it for later. You might find a better spot for it.

Enrichment: Get Peer Support

- Exchange drafts with a partner.
- Read each other’s drafts, concentrating on the unity within paragraphs.
- Point out a paragraph that is unified. Tell your partner why you feel that way.
- Point out a paragraph that lacks unity or focus. Offer suggestions for improvement.