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It was not until 1866, when Alexander Bain published his English Composition and Rhetoric, that there was any realization that the paragraph was an organic unit governed by a set of rules. Today, over one hundred years later, our conception of the paragraph, what it is and how it works, is still based on Bain's six rule theory. Yet, there has been little work done during this time to view the relationships between the paragraph and the essay, and to discuss the essay itself as an organic whole governed by a certain set of rules.

This paper is based on an experimental unit done with a Freshman English "Critical Reading and Writing" class at the University of Delaware. It proceeds on the assumption that there is a greater relationship between the paragraph and the essay than is generally accepted, and seeks to exploit this relationship. By looking first at certain rules and ideas in the smaller context of the paragraph, and then applying them to the essay in general, the student will hopefully receive a greater awareness of what constitutes good writing, and a greater confidence in the fact that he holds the power of control over what he writes, and not his writing over him.

Bain viewed the paragraph as "a collection of sentences with unity of purpose [which] handles and exhausts a distinct topic."[1] And he devised six rules to clarify this definition. First, he urged coherence by noting that "the bearing of each sentence upon what precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable."[2] Second was the use of parallelism for consecutive sentences which restate or illustrate the same idea. The presence of a topic sentence was Bain's third rule. Although many people immediately reject this concept, since it can be disproved in a number of cases, he does not state that it must be the first sentence in the paragraph. He is very careful to qualify what he says by noting that a topic sentence is usually found at the beginning of the paragraph, since this is the most logical and emphatic position in which to place it. But if the first sentence is preparatory, the topic sentence may come after that, or at the very end of the paragraph. Or sometimes, when special emphasis is needed, the topic sentence, or purpose, or theme of the paragraph, may be stated both at the beginning and at the end. Bain's fourth rule called for a logical and appropriate order of sentences within the paragraph. Fifth, a paragraph must be unified. This "implies a definite purpose, and forbids digressions and irrelevant matter."[3] And lastly, proportion within a paragraph is necessary because more important facts within the paragraph must be given more emphasis than unimportant ones.

Since Bain's formulation of these rules, rhetoricians have continually modified them, but have always kept Bain as a basis for their theories. James McCrimmon, in his Writing With a Purpose, begins his chapter called "Paragraphs: Units of Development" along much the same lines as Bain's first theories upon paragraph writing:

> A typical paragraph in an expository paper consists of a
> set of sentences acting as a unit . . . . Often the topic

of the paragraph is stated at or near the beginning and called the topic sentence, but even when no topic sentence is stated, the sentences within the paragraph are bound together by a common subject matter.[4]

McCrimmon's definition of a paragraph as a group of "sentences acting as a unit" is exactly the same as that of Bain. And it is interesting to notice that McCrimmon includes the idea of a topic sentence, one of Bain's six rules, within his definition of a paragraph, and not as one of his requirements for an effective paragraph. McCrimmon is also very careful to note that his definition of the paragraph expressly refers to expository writing, regardless of its form. This is a very important qualification, which Bain does not make, for the narrative paragraph, which proceeds linearly, cannot be governed by as strict a definition or set of rules as can the expository paragraph. The four rules that McCrimmon does set up for effective expository paragraphs are deeply indebted to those of Bain. He stresses the fact that each paragraph, as a self-contained unit, must have unity, completeness, order, and coherence.

The concept of unity is based upon Bain's rule stressing unity for clarity of purpose. Each paragraph must have a purpose, which is usually stated in a topic sentence, identifying its intentions, and keeping it from digressing. Thus, the paragraph may be considered an organic construction, for each sentence within the paragraph refers back to the topic sentence which sums up the main idea of the entire paragraph. If a sentence does not relate to the topic sentence, this shows either a digression or the fact that the topic sentence does not state a clear enough purpose.

Completeness is a natural outgrowth from the individual sentence/ topic sentence correspondence test. Once one determines that a paragraph is unified, it must be checked to see if the purpose stated within the topic sentence is adequately developed within the paragraph.

McCrimmon breaks his third requirement, order, into two sections. First, order is form. Even if a paragraph is unified, it must still be written according to some set form, which is determined by the type of paper a person is writing. If it is comparison and contrast, each paragraph might be modeled around the divided or alternating patterns. If illustration, a paragraph might introduce an example, or be an example. On a larger scale, order is movement or logical development, a concept McCrimmon breaks into four subsections: general to particular, particular to general, whole to parts, and either question to answer, or effect to cause. Order is closely allied to both unity and completeness because although a paragraph may be unified and complete, it still must be developed in logical stages.

Coherence brings these three concepts together and refines them. It takes the basics of unity, completeness, and order and transforms them into an aesthetic creation. It provides a smooth and pleasing paragraph. Coherence is closely allied to unity, but while unity just checks to see that sentences relate to the paragraph in general, coherence studies inter-sentence relationships, which provide a sense of continuity of thought and argument. Coherence may be achieved by anaphora, parallelism, deliberate repetition, contrast, and transitional words and phrases, and through the use of a variety of sentence styles.

But these four concepts can be taken beyond the paragraph level. Concluding his discussion of the paragraph, Bain wrote, "He that fully comprehends the method of a paragraph, will also comprehend the method of the entire work."[5] It only seems logical that if a paragraph, consisting of a number of sentences acting as a unit, is governed by these rules, then an essay, consisting of a number of paragraph units, should be governed by the same factors. Yet despite Bain's comment and Hepburn's observation of a paragraph as "a discourse in miniature,"[6] these rules have not been applied to the essay as a whole.

It would seem apropos to apply either Bain's rules on paragraph writing, or McCrimmon's, to the essay. When a student begins writing, whether it be a paragraph, a five to seven-hundred word essay, or a research paper, he must have a concept of the whole in mind to adequately and smoothly cover his subject. Thus, in the same way a paragraph usually begins with a topic or thesis statement, an essay must begin with a thesis statement or a paragraph which describes for the reader and writer alike the purpose of the paper. And although a student should keep the paragraph rules of unity, completeness, order, and coherence in mind while writing, they will not help him to write. It is in the rereading and editing that these rules are necessary to make sure each section is thorough, and that the work as a whole is well-developed and effective.

Bain developed the relationships between sentences and paragraphs deductively. This reasoning can be applied to the relationships between paragraphs and essays also. But the main purpose for discussing the paragraph first, and then applying its requirements to the essays as a whole, is that by beginning with a smaller unit it is easier to discuss these requirements and see how the individual parts that make up the essay work. If a student can understand these concepts and get an idea of totality within a smaller structure, and can organize this smaller structure, then hopefully he will be able to carry this ability over into a larger context, and see the essay or research paper not merely as a string of paragraphs, but as a unit made up of smaller units, each one of which has a special function in relation to the whole.

The experimental unit that my class did grew out of McCrimmon's chapter on paragraphs, but with some fundamental differences. McCrimmon has students read about the four rules he presents, and then look at them in sample paragraphs. But it seems that students will become more involved in this learning process if they can discuss these rules within their own writing. So our first exercise was to write a paragraph. This was done according to a simplified version of the method Kathleen Parks, a graduate student at the University of Delaware, has developed for remedial students for writing the five star essay. Students first write down ten verbs of their choice. From these they pick five, around which they write five separate sentences. Next, they pick a single sentence and use it in a paragraph. This sentence may be included at the very beginning of the paragraph, at the end, or anywhere in between. It is up to the student to decide where to place the sentence and how long to make the paragraph. The only direction given is to write a paragraph.

Once this was done, each of McCrimmon's concepts were discussed individually, and was looked at within each student's paragraph. To check for unity, each sentence within the paragraph should relate back

to the topic sentence. Any sentence that did not relate to this topic sentence was labelled "digression" and discarded.

Next, order was looked at. Which of McCrimmon's four structural patterns was used? Students also looked at the form of the paragraph. This reinforced their knowledge of comparison and contrast, illustration, and classification, which had either been studied previously, or were being studied at that time. And, since order within a narrative paragraph is so much different, examples of narrative order were shown and discussed.

The reason that no specific number of sentences or length of paragraph were included in the directions for writing the paragraph was so that completeness could be discussed. Without giving the student any guidelines, the object was to see if he did discuss his main idea thoroughly. Specificity was stressed so that the reader is at no point left guessing about a statement. But students were also warned about being too comprehensive. Completeness in a paragraph means adequate, although not necessarily exhaustive, discussion.

Coherence is closely allied to completeness. Many students argued that it was impossible to be complete in a single paragraph-- everything cannot be said. This is very true because the aim of a paragraph is ultimately a series of paragraphs or an essay of some type. Thus, coherence not only provides for smoothness, logic, variety, and transition within a paragraph, but also among paragraphs. As Adams Sherman Hill worte in The Principles of Rhetoric:

> To secure ease [coherence] in a composition as a whole,
> it is necessary not only to give ease to each paragraph,
> but also to make the transition from paragraph to paragraph
> without a jar . . . . A master of the art of transition
> begins and ends each paragraph so as to make it grow out
> of the last and into the next; he moves so easily and
> naturally that the reader follows without being aware
> of the steps he is taking.[7]

In order to put these four concepts, unity, completeness, order, and coherence, to conscious use, students were next assigned to write a paragraph based on the information given in one of two tables in McCrimmon. The first table showed the percentage of personal income apportioned to various national uses, while the second, and longer, table compared the males and females in twenty-seven positions of employment in regard to their salary, experience, age, education, and title.[8] The major purpose behind this exercise was to make students select a certain thesis statement and discuss it according to McCrimmon's rules. The exercise also showed them the importance of being selective in recording their proof, for all the material in either table could not be included in a single paragraph.

At this point the class broke with McCrimmon and began to look at other features of the paragraph, including description, tone, and audience. The third writing assignment grew out of a chapter in Scholes and Klaus's Elements of Writing entitled "The Shape of Written

Thought: Sequences." Students were asked to "write a brief description of a place known to members of your group. Present your description in three forms: 1. precise but unemotional, 2. so as to make the place attractive, 3. so as to make the place unattractive."[9] The first two writing exercises showed the students that they must adhere to certain principles governing the paragraph. This exercise builds their confidence by showing them that although they must conform to a certain set of rules, they are not powerless. They can still control the most important parts of the paragraph--the choice of words, and the voice in which these words will be presented. And finally, this exercise gives them the chance to take risks and try different styles of writing in an atmosphere where their work is going to be talked about but not graded.

Yet, lest this power over their words become too intoxicating, a fourth assignment was designed to show the students that they must used this power discriminately. This lesson concerned audience. The purpose of most types of writing is to get someone to listen. When a student writes, he may know to whom he is aiming the discourse, but too often this knowledge is not carried over into the writing style. This assignment on the writer-reader relationship grew out of "The Existence of a Written Work" in Scholes and Klaus. Students were asked to write three paragraphs on the same topic, but employing the three types of writer-reader relationship: writing up to the reader, down to the reader, and establishing a level relationship between writer and reader. This practice helps the student to see the different ways in which he can correspond with his readers, and he can begin to discern which style he wants to use for his specific audience.

Finally, unity, completeness, order, coherence, tone, and writer-reader relationship were all brought together and applied to the essay in general. The essay was concerned with classifying the different male and female images presented in sample advertisements in McQuade and Atwan's Popular Writing in America.[10] The essay was done out-of-class, but students were given a worksheet (see Appendix A) on the day that it was due, and asked to fully discuss their impressions of the essay which they had just completed in seven subject areas.

Returning to the concept studied first, students were asked to apply the idea of unity, up until this point discussed only in relation to the paragraph unit, to their essay as a whole. To do this, they were asked to check each paragraph in the essay against the thesis sentence or paragraph at the beginning of the essay in the same way that they had checked the unity of their paragraphs originally. As Hill writes, "To secure unity in a composition as a whole, it is necessary not only to make each paragraph a unit, but also to make all the paragraphs together constitute a smaller whole."[11]

It is also important to ask, in relation to this concept, whether the introductory paragraph is a hook or thesis type paragraph. This is necessary to note in a discussion of order, but must also be looked at here so that the student can see if it has any effect on the unity of his paper, and also to check to see if he is sure which statement actually is the thesis statement.

Completeness can be a matter of personal opinion, but it is importa[nt] for students to look at it in their essays. Does the paper actually

actually discuss or prove what it says it will at the beginning? Paragraph density is also helpful in looking at completeness. Is each paragraph constructed so that it is accomplishing as much as it can, or would it contribute more to the essay if it were reworked?

Under the concept of order, it seems appropriate to ask the students if the form which they had been assigned for the essay was actually the best way to present the material solicited. Could the male or female images in the ads have been more easily and clearly discussed in a different format? Students were also asked to see if any of the other types of writing occurred within their classifications, for too often they do not realize that the use of one form does not automatically exclude the use of any others within that form. Order was also looked at in regard to movement. Often the choice regarding the order of topics discussed in an essay is subconscious, or something that is felt to be dictated by the form chosen for the essay. This question attempted to get the students consciously to see how they put their essays together, how they combined their paragraph blocks within the whole composition.

The final exercise applying the four requirements for paragraph writing to the form of the essay was on coherence. The idea here was to see how well the students caulked the joints when putting their paragraph blocks together, for "too much attention can hardly be paid to the manner of getting from one paragraph to another."[12]

The fifth question on the worksheet was concerned with tone. The object of this part was simply for each student to notice if he adopted any bias in the essay, or whether it was precise and unemotional, and to determine the nature of his relationship with his reader(s).

The key section on the worksheet, and a topic which was continually stressed throughout the semester, concerned control. The student must realize that he has control over his essay, and need not be manipulated by his words. This was basically a subjective question and sought to determine the degree of control the student thought he had over his essay after working on the questionnaire, as compared to what he thought he had when writing the essay.

And finally, the last question on the worksheet asked the students to record what they thought were the strengths and weaknesses on their papers. Mary H. Beaven notes that "many students have never considered the possibility there could be something good about their writing . . . To have to point out something of which they are proud motivates   students to write from a different perspective."[13] And by looking at their weak points, students feel more confident because they see that it is acceptable to have some problems in their writing. Even the best and most prolific writers have passages with which they are never quite satisfied.

As a final exercise, students took the classification essays which they had just looked at in detail and graded them. This meant putting corrections, comments, and grades on the papers, just as if they were the ones responsible for determining the "fate" of the essay. This exercise translates the thoughts generated by the worksheet into a more concrete editing job in which the students can mark right on the compositions.

As the culmination of the unit, the worksheet and grading exercises were meant to combine all of the pieces and see how everything actually did relate to the essay. It was meant to encourage proofreading and to convey the idea that a grade on a paper is not given arbitrarily, but only after careful thought and consideration.

As always, the effectiveness of an experiment like this cannot be accurately judged on the basis of one small group, and the short period of time in which it was conducted. Yet, although some parts of the unit did not seem to be as illuminating as they were ideally conceived to be, I feel that the major purposes of the experiment, to help students to become more aware of their writing, and to see connections between the paragraph as a unit and the essay as a unit, were helpful to a majority of students.

I think that the ten-verb-five-sentence-one-paragraph method of illustrating the requirements governing effective paragraphs, however subject these rules may be to qualifications, was very effective because each student worked with his own paragraph. Looking for these concepts in a creation of his own personalized the situation. It is easy to become disinterested in seeing how sample paragraphs in a grammar book are put together, but looking for certain things in one's own paragraph makes the looking more interesting and fun. Also, the student feels pleased when he finds unity or one of the other concepts in his work, and more determined to do better next time if it was not there.

Writing the paragraphs in McCrimmon on war or job status was especially useful here, for it stressed the need to review a list of material, write a thesis statement, and illustrate it, and also to put the four rules studied to use in an objective paragraph. The important fact stressed here was not to try to be too comprehensive, because it was impossible to incorporate all of the information in either listing into a single paragraph.

The exercise regarding tone did not have any overwhelming results, but it seemed to make the students aware of the presence of a tone in a piece of writing. The majority of students were able to identify the tone which they had used in their classification essays, something they probably would not have been able to do before.

The paragraphs written developing different writer-reader relationships seemed to be the least effective. The paragraphs themselves and the evidence of their usefulness, both on the worksheet and in later essays, were lacking in the hoped-for response. I think this was due in a large part to the small amount of development this section of the experiment received. Besides increasing the amount of time spent on thi idea, I think an exercise regarding the suitability of language to diffe types of people would be more helpful in showing the conscious and uncon changes caused by these different audiences.

The self-evaluation worksheets were the most useful and most succes As can be expected, a certain few students answered each question with a hearty "Yes" and went on to elaborate upon the merits of their essays. But disregarding this minority, the students in general were quite perceptive of the concepts and techniques they used in their papers. Wheth this was a conscious part of their writing or seen only when discussing this essay, or whether they will remember these things in later essays,

it is impossible to tell. But the fact that they can identify these ideas in their essays can only encourage us to believe that some of the students will continue to do so, and will consciously use them in their writing in the future. As one student wrote, "Now that I have commented on my own work I can see how I was able to get my point across to the reader."

Of the most value on the worksheet was the question regarding control. It was an important question because it asked the student to think about whether he actually had as much control over his essay, after he had looked at it more in-depth on the worksheet, as he thought he had when he was writing it. Did the essay accomplish what he had thought it would? The students saw varying degrees of difference in their control "before and after." And it was interesting to notice that the class was not split good students versus bad students on this question. Some from each group saw a difference in their control, while others saw no difference.

And finally, the proofreading and grading exercises was successful only in one way. I do not think that it encouraged the students to proofread because as they corrected their essays they did not find too many errors, and instead tended to mark things which might be wrong. But the grading was seen to be useful merely by the overwhelming disapproval it received. Everyone said that they could not grade the essay precisely because it was their own. And this was the objective of the assignment--to make them realize that they must detach themselves from their writing and be totally objective when they proofread and edit. It was also interesting to notice that it was the best students who were the most objective and tended to grade themselves the hardest.

Overall, I was personally pleased with the results of this experiment mainly because it did make a majority of the students look more carefully at what they had written after they wrote it. Once a sentence, or a paragraph, or an essay, is written down, it can be changed. And anything that makes the students more aware of this, and more aware of their writing in general, must, to a degree, be successful.

In the same way that a paragraph is a group of sentences that act as a unit, an essay is a group of paragraphs that act as a unit. We have been applying a number of criteria to individual paragraphs to look at their construction and purpose, to learn about the aims and abilities of the writer, and to determine the effectiveness of the paragraph in regard to the reader. Discuss your Essay #4 in these terms. Base your discussion on the following concepts and questions:

1. Unity: Each essay has a purpose which is usually stated in its introductory paragraph and every paragraph must relate back to this introductory paragraph. Is your essay unified? Also, what type of introductory paragraph did you use (thesis or hook) and why?

2. Completeness: Is your essay complete? Does it fully develop the main idea(s) which it sets out to discuss? Comment on paragraph density (as opposed to sentence density).

3. Order:
   a. Form: This essay is, of course, classification. However, given the information which you present here--the images of the America[n] male or female in representative ads--is classification the best format to discuss these ideas or would another form have been better (i.e. cause and effect, comparison and contrast, process [how to], illustration, narrative)? Do any of these forms show up within your classification essay?
   b. Direction or Movement: How did you get from the beginning to the end? In what order did you discuss your classifications (general to particular, particular to general or whole to parts) and why? More on this in McCrimmon pp. 88-90.

4. Coherence: Do your sentences flow together? Do your paragraphs? Is there continuity between paragraphs? Why or why not? If so, is this due to the use of transitional words and phrases? Comment also on sentence variety (standard, balanced and periodic).

5. Tone:
   a. Biased (for or against) or unbiased and precise?
   b. Written up to, down to, or on the same level as your reader? Why did you do this the way you did?

6. We did a number of exercises experimenting with different tones and different sentence styles in order to demonstrate the writer's control over what he writes. Did you feel, when you wrote Essay #4, that you had control over it? Why or why not? Has this feeling changed now that you have looked at the essay more in-depth?

7. Based upon your discussion of the above questions, what do you see as the major defect(s) of your essay? The major asset(s)? Why? If you were writing this essay over again, what, if anything, would change in its form, style, tone?

NOTES

[1]Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., "Alexander Bain and the Rise of the Organic Paragraph," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 51 (1965), 403.

[2]Unless otherwise noted, these rules were quoted and/or paraphrased from those listed in Ned A. Schearer, "Alexander Bain and the Genesis of Paragraph Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59 (1972), 413.

[3]Rodgers, p. 404.

[4]James M. McCrimmon, *Writing With a Purpose*, 6th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p. 84.

[5]Rodgers, p. 405.

[6]Rodgers, p. 405.

[7]Adams Sherman Hill, *The Principles of Rhetoric* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1896), p. 239.

[8]McCrimmon, pp. 107-11.

[9]Robert Scholes and Carl H. Klaus, *Elements of Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 72-73.

[10]Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan, *Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience, Shorter Alternate Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[11]Hill, p. 239.

[12]Hill, p. 239.

[13]Mary H. Beaven, "Individualized Goal Setting, Self-Evaluation, and Peer Evaluation," in *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*, eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1977), p. 144.