Module 3: Clearer Writing

Aims of this module:
- To show you how the structure of an academic text is related to the structure of ideas
- To enable you to recognise the parts of a paragraph and their purposes

The structure of the text and the structure of ideas

Each academic text has an over-arching topic, purpose and (usually) argument. In order for a reader to find your writing clear, she/he should be able to see the structure of ideas in your text, be able to predict what is coming next, and see how each part of the text relates to the overall purpose and topic. When there is a very predictable structure – like Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, Conclusion – the writer and reader can rely on this as a kind of map showing the structure of ideas and the relationship between parts of the text and the overall purpose and topic. However, when there is not a predictable structure, the writer needs to provide an overview of the structure in the introduction to the text – usually towards the end of the introduction.

Introduction	…including an overview of the structure: Topic 1, Topic 2 & Topic 3

Topic 1 – First paragraph / section

Topic 2 – Second paragraph / section

Topic 3 – Third paragraph / section

Example

The following example comes from a student essay in Nursing. The overall topic was *"Future Directions in Nursing Care of Intellectually Disabled People"*. Notice the way that the introduction outlines the structure of this topic, by naming three areas of directions in nursing. Each area is then picked up at the beginning of the relevant paragraph, so the reader can clearly see how each paragraph links back to the introduction.

....I will look at a series of possibilities that may occur in mental health services, particularly the nursing care of intellectually disabled people. **I will discuss three overlapping areas:** general directions of nursing, directions for psychiatric nurses and directions involving intellectually disabled people.	**From the Introduction** Overview of the structure: 'three overlapping areas'
One of the areas of nursing that is growing is in the cure of people who are unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors. This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing technology available for those disorders, and population changes...	**Beginning of Paragraph 3** First area: general directions of nursing
If **nursing of psychiatric patients** is to remain an integral part of the nursing profession, it will need to follow the developments apparent in general nursing. First and foremost, education will need to be of a tertiary nature. In Western Australia education of psychiatric nurses has been in-service hospital training...	**Beginning of Paragraph 8** Second area: directions for psychiatric nursing
I will now turn to the area of greatest importance - **the provision of services for intellectually disabled people.** Since 1977 there have been ten major government reports in Australia on services for people who are intellectually disabled. All states have produced at least one, yet no State has fully implemented the recommendations. Some have made no changes at all to date...	**Beginning of Paragraph 12** Third area: directions for intellectually disabled people

The internal structure of a paragraph

Just as the whole text or essay has a structure, so does an individual paragraph. The structure of a paragraph is similar to that of a whole text, in that it has a beginning, middle and end. Also, the strategies for making the paragraph structure clear are similar in some ways to the strategies for making the text structure clear, discussed above.

ESSAY STRUCTURE

Essay introduction
....
First paragraph   ....
Second paragraph   ....
Third paragraph   ....
etc. etc.
Essay conclusion   ....

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE
for each paragraph

Paragraph beginning   Paragraph middle ....   Paragraph end

Paragraph Structure

In general, an effective writer will state the **Topic** of their paragraph in the first sentence of that paragraph. This introduction to the paragraph may also provide some background to the topic.

Once the topic of the paragraph has been set up in the first sentence (or sentences), the writer then develops this topic in the **Body** of the paragraph.

Finally, the writer might include a **Conclusion** to the paragraph. Often the concluding sentence(s) signals how the topic will be developed in following paragraphs; i.e. it forms a kind of link between paragraphs.

The following paragraph is divided into these three parts:

It can be argued that the Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons: autocratic rule and inadequate political representation.	**TOPIC**
None of the leaders of the government, which has been based on a Western democratic constitutional system, have attempted to rule the country in a democratic way. Instead they have instituted autocratic rule. The second reason has been the lack of strong political parties. As a result, when constitutional crises have arisen there has not been sufficient popular support behind any one party to overcome the situation.	**BODY**
While it is necessary to recognise that these are not the only factors determining the failure of a democratic system they stand as the most prominent reasons.	**CONCLUSION**

Exercise 1

The following is a piece of student writing on poverty which includes the three parts described earlier (Topic, Body and Conclusion) only they are in the wrong order. Try to reorganise these sentences so that they form a coherent text. Once you have reorganised the paragraph draw arrows between words and phrases which influenced the new ordering.

a)   The existence of relative poverty is determined by comparison with the normal standard of living of a society.
b)   In Australian society, for example, relative poverty exists as shown in the statistics for child poverty.
c)   Absolute poverty is generally restricted to the Third World where basic life essentials are lacking.
d)   Poverty occurs when requirements for basic living are not met.
e)   Two types of poverty can be seen in the world today, absolute and relative.
f)   These life essentials are food, fuel and shelter.

Answers

Exercise 1

Poverty occurs when requirements for basic living are not met. Two types of poverty can be seen in the world today, absolute and relative. Absolute poverty is generally restricted to the Third World where basic life essentials are lacking. These life essentials are food, fuel and shelter. The existence of relative poverty is determined by comparison with the normal standard of living of a society. In Australian society, for example, relative poverty exists as shown in the statistics for child poverty.

This diagram shows the words and phrases that influenced the order of this text, and arrows show the pieces of information that are related.

Poverty occurs when requirements for basic living are not met.

Two types of poverty can be seen in the world today, absolute and relative.

Absolute poverty is generally restricted to the Third World where basic life essentials are lacking.

These life essentials are food, fuel and shelter.

The existence of relative poverty is determined by comparison with the normal standard of living of a society.

In Australian society, for example, relative poverty exists as shown in the statistics for child poverty.