

# 6

## WRITING THE PARAGRAPHS IN THE FIRST DRAFT



After prewriting, deciding on a thesis, and developing and organizing evidence, you're ready to write a first draft—a rough, provisional version of your essay. Some people work slowly as they prepare their drafts, while others quickly dash off their drafts. No matter how you proceed, you should concentrate on providing paragraphs that support your thesis. Also try to include all relevant examples, facts, and opinions, sequencing this material as effectively as you can.

Because of your work in the preceding stages, the first draft may flow quite smoothly. But don't be discouraged if it doesn't. You may find that your thesis has to be reshaped, that a point no longer fits, that you need to return to a prewriting activity to generate additional material. Such stopping and starting is to be expected. Writing the first draft is a process of discovery, involving the continual clarification and refining of ideas.

### HOW TO MOVE FROM OUTLINE TO FIRST DRAFT

There's no single right way to prepare a first draft. With experience, you'll undoubtedly find your own basic approach, adapting it to suit each paper's length, the time available, and the instructor's requirements. Some writers rely

heavily on their scratch lists or outlines; others glance at them only occasionally. Some people write the first draft in longhand; others use a typewriter or computer.

However you choose to proceed, consider the following general suggestions when moving from an outline or scratch list to a first draft:

- Make the outline's *main topics* (I, II, III) the *topic sentences* of the essay's supporting paragraphs. (Topic sentences are discussed later in this chapter.)
- Make the outline's *subtopics* (A, B, C) the *subpoints* in each paragraph.
- Make the outline's *supporting points* (1, 2, 3) the *key examples* and *reasons* in each paragraph.
- Make the outline's *specific details* (a, b, c) the *secondary examples*, facts, statistics, expert opinion, and quotations in each paragraph.

(To see how one student, Harriet Davids, moved from outline to first draft, turn to pages 83–84.)

## GENERAL SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO PROCEED

Although outlines and lists are valuable for guiding your work, don't be so dependent on them that you shy away from new ideas that surface during your writing of the first draft. It's during this time that promising new thoughts often pop up; as they do, jot them down. Then, at the appropriate point, go back and evaluate them: Do they support your thesis? Are they appropriate for your essay's purpose, audience, tone, and point of view? If so, go ahead and include the material in your draft.

It's easy to get stuck while preparing the first draft if you try to edit as you write. Remember: A draft isn't intended to be perfect. For the time being, adopt a relaxed, noncritical attitude. Working as quickly as you can, don't stop to check spelling, correct grammar, or refine sentence structure. Save these tasks for later. One good way to help remind you that the first draft is tentative is to prepare it in longhand, using scrap paper and pencil. Writing on alternate lines also underscores your intention to revise later on, when the extra space will make it easier to add and delete material. Similarly, writing on only one side of the paper can prove helpful if, during revision, you decide to move a section to another part of the paper.

## IF YOU GET BOGGED DOWN

All writers get bogged down now and then. The best thing to do is accept that sooner or later it will happen to you. When it does, keep calm and try to write something—no matter how awkward or imprecise it may seem. Just jot a

reminder to yourself in the margin (“Fix this,” “Redo,” or “Ugh!”) to finetune the section later. Or leave a blank space to hold a spot for the right words when they finally break loose. It may also help to reread—out loud is best—what you’ve already written. Regaining a sense of the larger context is often enough to get you moving again. You might also try talking your way through a troublesome section. Like most people, you probably speak more easily than you write; by speaking aloud, you tap this oral fluency and put it to work in your writing.

If a section of the essay strikes you as particularly difficult, don’t spend time struggling with it. Move on to an easier section, write that, and then return to the challenging part. If you’re still getting nowhere, take a break. Watch television, listen to music, talk with friends. While you’re relaxing, your thoughts may loosen up and untangle the knotty section. If, on the other hand, an obligation such as a class or an appointment forces you to stop writing when the draft is going well, jot down a few notes in the margin to remind yourself of your train of thought. The notes will keep you from getting stuck when you pick up the draft later.

## A SUGGESTED SEQUENCE FOR WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

Because you read essays from beginning to end, you may assume that writers work the same way, starting with the introduction and going straight through to the conclusion. Often, however, this isn’t the case. In fact, since an introduction depends so heavily on everything that follows, it’s usually best to write the introduction *after* the essay’s body.

When preparing your first draft, you may find it helpful to follow this sequence:

1. Write the essay’s supporting paragraphs.
2. Write the other paragraphs in the essay’s body.
3. Write the introduction.
4. Write the conclusion.

### Write the Supporting Paragraphs

Before starting to write the essay’s **supporting paragraphs**, enter your thesis at the top of the page. You might even underline key words in the thesis to keep yourself focused on the central ideas you plan to develop. Also, now that you’ve planned the essay’s overall organization, you may want to add to your thesis a **plan of development**: a brief *overview* of the essay’s *major points in the exact order* in which you will discuss those points. (For more on plans of development, see pages 40–41.)

Not every essay needs a plan of development. In a brief paper, readers can often keep track of ideas without this extra help. But in a longer, more complex essay, a plan of development helps readers follow the progression of main points

in the supporting paragraphs. Whether or not you include a plan of development, always keep in mind that writing the draft often leads to new ideas; you may have to revise your thesis, plan of development, and supporting paragraphs as the draft unfolds.

Drawn from the main sections in your outline or scratch list, each supporting paragraph should develop an aspect of your essay's thesis or plan of development. Although there are no hard-and-fast rules, strong supporting paragraphs are (1) often focused by topic sentences, (2) organized around one or more patterns of development, (3) unified, (4) specific, (5) adequately supported, and (6) coherent. Aim for as many of these qualities as you can in the first draft. The material on the following pages will help keep you focused on your goal. But don't expect the draft paragraphs to be perfect; you'll have the chance to revise them later on.

### Use Topic Sentences

Frequently, each supporting paragraph in an essay is focused by a **topic sentence**. This sentence usually states a main point in support of the thesis. In a formal outline, such a point customarily appears, often in abbreviated form, as a *main topic* marked with a roman numeral (I, II, III).

Student  
essay in  
progress

The transformation of an outline's main topic to a paragraph's topic sentence is often a matter of stating your attitude toward the outline topic. When changing from main outline topic to topic sentence, you may also add details that make the topic sentence more specific and concrete. Compare, for example, Harriet Davids's outline on pages 59–60 with her first draft on pages 83–84. You'll see that the outline entry "I. Distractions from homework" turned into the topic sentence "Parents have to control all the new distractions/temptations that turn kids away from schoolwork" (paragraph 2). The difference between the outline topic and the topic sentence is thus twofold: The topic sentence has an *element of opinion* ("have to control"), and it is focused by *added details* (in this case, the people involved—parents and children).

The topic sentence functions as a kind of mini-thesis for the paragraph. Generally one or two sentences in length, the topic sentence usually appears at or near the beginning of the paragraph. However, it may also appear at the end, in the middle, or—with varied wording—several times within the paragraph. In still other cases, a single topic sentence may state an idea developed in more than one paragraph. When a paragraph is intended primarily to clarify or inform, you may want to place its topic sentence at the beginning; that way, readers are prepared to view everything that follows in light of that main idea. If, though, you intend a paragraph to heighten suspense or to convey a feeling of discovery, you may prefer to delay the topic sentence until the end.

Regardless of its length or location, the topic sentence states the paragraph's main idea. The other sentences in the paragraph provide support for this central point in the form of examples, facts, expert opinion, and so on. Like a thesis statement, the topic sentence *signals the paragraph's subject* and frequently *indicates the writer's attitude* toward that subject. In the topic sentences that follow, the subject of the paragraph is underlined once and the attitude toward that subject is underlined twice:

### Topic Sentences

Some students select a particular field of study for the wrong reasons.

The ocean dumping of radioactive waste is a ticking time bomb.

Several contemporary rock groups show unexpected sensitivity to social issues.

Political candidates are sold like slickly packaged products.

As you work on the first draft, you may find yourself writing paragraphs without paying too much attention to topic sentences. That's fine, as long as you remember to evaluate the paragraphs later on. When revising, you can provide a topic sentence for a paragraph that needs a sharper focus, recast a topic sentence for a paragraph that ended up taking an unexpected turn, even eliminate a topic sentence altogether if a paragraph's content is sufficiently unified to imply its point.

With experience, you'll develop an instinct for writing focused paragraphs without having to pay such close attention to topic sentences. A good way to develop such an instinct is to note how the writers in this book use topic sentences to shape paragraphs and clarify meaning. (If you'd like some practice in identifying topic sentences, see pages 85–86.)

### Use the Patterns of Development

As you saw on pages 54–55, an entire essay can be organized around one or more patterns of development. These patterns can also provide the organizational framework for an essay's supporting paragraphs. Assume you're writing an article for your town newspaper with the thesis "Year-round residents of an ocean community must take an active role in safeguarding the seashore environment." As the following examples indicate, your supporting paragraphs could develop this thesis through a variety of patterns, with each paragraph's topic sentence suggesting a specific pattern or combination of patterns.

#### Topic Sentence

In a nearby ocean community, signs of environmental damage are everywhere.

Typically, residents blame industry or tourists for such damage.

Residents' careless behavior is also to blame, however.

Even environmentally concerned residents may contribute to the problem.

Fortunately, not all seaside towns are plagued by such environmental problems.

#### Possible Pattern of Development

*Description* of a seaside town with polluted waters, blighted trees, and diseased marine life

*Narration* of a conversation among seaside residents

*Illustrations* of residents' littering the beach, injuring marine life while motor boating, walking over fragile sand dunes

*Cause-effect* explanation of the way Styrofoam packaging and plastic food wrap, even when properly disposed of in a trash can, can harm scavenging seagulls

*Comparison-contrast* of one troubled shore community with another more ecologically sound one

**Topic Sentence**

It's clear that shore residents must become "environmental activists."

Residents can get involved in a variety of pro-environmental activities.

Moreover, getting involved is an easy matter.

Such activism yields significant rewards.

**Possible Pattern of Development**

*Definition* of an *environmental activist*

*Division-classification* of activities at the neighborhood, town, and municipal levels

*Process analysis* of the steps for getting involved at the various levels

A final *argumentation-persuasion* pitch showing residents the benefits of responsible action

Of course, each supporting paragraph in an essay doesn't have to be organized according to a different pattern of development; several paragraphs may use the same pattern. Nor is it necessary for any one paragraph to be restricted to a single pattern; supporting paragraphs often combine patterns. For example, the topic sentence "Fortunately, not all seaside towns are plagued by such environmental problems" might be developed primarily through *comparison-contrast*, but the paragraph would need a fair amount of *description* to clarify the differences between towns. (For more on the way the patterns of development come into play throughout the writing process, see pages 30–32, 40, 47–48, 54–55, and Chapter 10.)

**Make the Paragraphs Unified**

Just as overall evidence must support an essay's thesis (pages 46–47), the facts, opinions, and examples in each supporting paragraph must have *direct bearing* on the paragraph's topic sentence. If the paragraph has no topic sentence, the supporting material must be *consistent* with the paragraph's *implied focus*. A paragraph is **unified** when it meets these requirements.

Consider the following sample paragraph, taken from an essay illustrating recent changes in Americans' television-viewing habits. The paragraph focuses on people's reasons for switching from network to cable television. As you'll see, though, the paragraph lacks unity because it contains points (underlined> unrelated to its main idea. Specifically, the criticism of cable's foul language contradicts the paragraph's topic sentence—"Many people consider cable TV an improvement over network television." To present a balanced view of cable versus network television, the writer should discuss these points, but in *another paragraph*.

**Nonunified Support**

Many people consider cable TV an improvement over network television. For one thing, viewers usually prefer the movies on cable. Unlike network films, cable movies are often only months old, they have not been edited by censors, and they are not interrupted by commercials. Growing numbers of people also feel that cable specials are superior to the ones the networks grind

out. Cable viewers may enjoy such performers as U2, Madonna, or Chris Rock in concert, whereas the networks continue to broadcast tired, look-alike sit-coms and boring awards ceremonies. There is, however, one problem with cable comedians. The foul language many of them use makes it hard to watch these cable specials with children. The networks, in contrast, generally present "clean" shows that parents and children can watch together. Then, too, cable TV offers viewers more flexibility since it schedules shows at various times over the month. People working night shifts or attending evening classes can see movies in the afternoon, and viewers missing the first twenty minutes of a show can always catch them later. It's not surprising that cable viewership is growing while network ratings have taken a plunge.

### Make the Paragraphs Specific

If your supporting paragraphs are vague, readers will lose interest, remain unconvinced of your thesis, even have trouble deciphering your meaning. In contrast, paragraphs filled with **concrete, specific details** engage readers, lend force to ideas, and clarify meaning.

Following are two versions of a paragraph from an essay about trends in the business community. Although both paragraphs focus on one such trend—flexible working hours—note how the first version's vague generalities leave meaning unclear. *What*, for example, is meant by "flex-time scheduling"? *Which* companies have tried it? *Where*, specifically, are these companies located? *How*, exactly, does flex-time increase productivity, lessen conflict, and reduce accidents? The second paragraph answers these questions with specifics and, as a result, is more informative and interesting.

### Nonspecific Support

More and more companies have begun to realize that flex-time scheduling offers advantages. Several companies outside Boston have tried flex-time scheduling and are pleased with the way the system reduces the difficulties their employees face getting to work. Studies show that flex-time scheduling also increases productivity, reduces on-the-job conflict, and minimizes work-related accidents.

### Specific Support

More and more companies have begun to realize that flex-time scheduling offers advantages over a rigid 9-to-5 routine. Along suburban Boston's Route 128, such companies as Compugraphics and

Consolidated Paper now permit employees to schedule their arrival any time between 6 a.m. and 11 a.m. The corporations report that the number of rush-hour jams and accidents has fallen dramatically. As a result, employees no longer arrive at work weighed down by tension induced by choking clouds of exhaust fumes and the blaring horns of gridlocked drivers. Studies sponsored by the journal *Business Quarterly* show that this more mellow state of mind benefits corporations. Traffic-stressed employees begin their workday anxious and exasperated, still grinding their teeth at their fellow commuters, their frustration often spilling over into their performance at work. By contrast, stress-free employees work more productively and take fewer days off. They are more tolerant of co-workers and customers, and less likely to balloon minor irritations into major confrontations. Perhaps most important, employees arriving at work relatively free of stress can focus their attention on working safely. They rack up significantly fewer on-the-job accidents, such as falls and injuries resulting from careless handling of dangerous equipment. Flex-time improves employee well-being, and as well-being rises, so do company profits.

***Five Strategies for Making Paragraphs Specific.*** How can you make the evidence in your paragraphs specific? the following techniques should help.

- 1. Provide examples that answer *who, which, what, and similar questions.*** In contrast to the vague generalities in the first paragraph on flex-time scheduling, the second paragraph provides examples that answer a series of basic questions. For instance, the general comment "Several companies outside Boston" (*which* companies?) is replaced by "Compugraphics and Consolidated Paper." The vague phrase "difficulties their employees face getting to work" (*what* difficulties?) is dramatized with the examples "rush-hour jams and accidents." Similarly, "work-related accidents" (*which* accidents?) is illustrated with "falls and injuries resulting from careless handling of dangerous equipment."
- 2. Replace general nouns and adjectives with precise ones.** In the following sentences, note how much sharper images become when exact nouns and adjectives replace imprecise ones:

**General**

A man had trouble lifting the box out of the old car.

**More Specific**

A young man, out of shape, struggled to lift the heavy crate out of the beat-up sports car.

**Most Specific**

Joe, only twenty years old but more than fifty pounds overweight, struggled to lift the heavy wooden crate out of the rusty and dented Mustang.



3. **Replace abstract words with concrete ones.** Notice the way the example on the right, firmly grounded in the physical, clarifies the intangible concepts in the example on the left:

**Abstract**

The fall day had great *beauty*, despite its *dreariness*.

**Concrete**

*Red, yellow, and orange* leaves *gleamed wetly* through the *gray mist*.

(For more on making abstract language concrete, see pages 121–122 in Chapter 8.)

4. **Use words that appeal to the five senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, sound).** The sentence on the left lacks impact because it fails to convey any sensory impressions; the sentence on the right, though, gains power through the use of sensory details:

**Without Sensory Images**

The computer room is eerie.

**With Sensory Images**

In the computer room, keys *click* and printers *grate* while row after row of students stare into screens that *glow without shedding any light*. (sound and sight)

(For more on sensory language, see pages 160–161 in Chapter 11.)

5. **Use vigorous verbs.** Linking verbs (such as *seem* and *appear*) and *to be* verbs (such as *is* and *were*) paint no pictures. Strong verbs, however, create sharp visual images. Compare the following examples:

**Weak Verbs**

The spectators *seemed* pleased and *were* enthusiastic when the wheelchair marathoners *went* by.

**Strong Verbs**

The spectators *cheered* and *whistled* when the wheelchair marathoners *whizzed* by.

(For more on strong verbs, see pages 122–123 in Chapter 8.)

### Provide Adequate Support

Each supporting paragraph should also have **adequate support** so that your readers can see clearly the validity of the topic sentence. At times, a single extended example is sufficient; generally, however, an assortment of examples, facts, personal observations, and so forth is more effective.

Following are two versions of a paragraph from a paper showing how difficult it is to get personal, attentive service nowadays at gas stations, supermarkets, and department stores. Both paragraphs focus on the problem at gas stations, but one paragraph is much more effective. As you'll see, the first paragraph starts with good specific support, yet fails to provide enough of it. The second paragraph offers additional examples, descriptive details, and dialog—all of which make the writing stronger and more convincing.

### **Inadequate Support**

Gas stations are a good example of this impersonal attitude. At many stations, attendants have even stopped pumping gas. Motorists pull up to a combination convenience store and gas island where an attendant is enclosed in a glass booth with a tray for taking money. The driver must get out of the car, pump the gas, and walk over to the booth to pay. That's a real inconvenience, especially when compared with the way service stations used to be run.

### **Adequate Support**

Gas stations are a good example of this impersonal attitude. At many stations, attendants have even stopped pumping gas. Motorists pull up to a combination convenience store and gas island where an attendant is enclosed in a glass booth with a tray for taking money. The driver must get out of the car, pump the gas, and walk over to the booth to pay. Even at stations that still have "pump jockeys," employees seldom ask, "Check your oil?" or wash windshields, although they may grudgingly point out the location of the bucket and squeegee. And customers with a balky engine or a nonfunctioning heater are usually out of luck. Why? Many gas stations have eliminated on-duty mechanics. The skillful mechanic who could replace a belt or fix a tire in a few minutes has been replaced by a teenager in a jumpsuit who doesn't know a carburetor from a charge card and couldn't care less.

### **Make the Paragraphs Coherent**

A jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces heaped on a table remains a baffling jumble unless it's clear how the pieces fit together. Similarly, paragraphs can be unified, specific, and adequately supported, yet—if internally disjointed or inadequately connected to each other—leave readers feeling confused. Readers need to be able to follow with ease the progression of thought within and between paragraphs. One idea must flow smoothly and logically into the next; that is, your writing must be **coherent**.

The following paragraph lacks coherence for two main reasons. First, it sequences ideas improperly. (The idea about toll attendants' being cut off from co-workers is introduced, dropped, then picked up again. References to motorists are similarly scattered throughout the paragraph.) Second, it doesn't indicate how individual ideas are related. (What, for example, is the connection between drivers who pass by without saying anything and attendants who have to work at night?)

### Incoherent Support

Collecting tolls on the turnpike must be one of the loneliest jobs in the world. Each toll attendant sits in his or her booth, cut off from other attendants. Many drivers pass by each booth. None stays long enough for a brief "hello." Most don't acknowledge the attendant at all. Many toll attendants work at night, pushing them "out of sync" with the rest of the world. The attendants have to deal with rude drivers who treat them like non-people, swearing at them for the long lines at the tollgate. Attendants dislike how cut off they feel from their co-workers. Except for infrequent breaks, they have little chance to chat with each other and swap horror stories--small pleasures that would make their otherwise routine jobs bearable.

### Coherent Support

Collecting tolls on the turnpike must be one of the loneliest jobs in the world. First of all, although many drivers pass by the attendants, none stays long enough for more than a brief "hello." Most drivers, in fact, don't acknowledge the toll collectors at all, with the exception of those rude drivers who treat the attendants like non-people, swearing at them for the long lines at the tollgate. Then, too, many toll attendants work at night, pushing them further "out of sync" with the rest of the world. Worst of all, attendants say, is how isolated they feel from their co-workers. Each attendant sits in his or her booth, cut off from other attendants. Except for infrequent breaks, they have little chance to chat with each other and swap horror stories--small pleasures that would make their otherwise routine jobs bearable.

To avoid the kinds of problems found in the incoherent paragraph, use—as the revised version does—two key strategies: (1) a clearly *chronological, spatial, or emphatic order* ("Worst of all, attendants say . . .") and (2) *signal devices* ("First of all, although many drivers pass by . . .") to show how ideas are connected. The following sections discuss these two strategies.

***Chronological, Spatial, and Emphatic Order.*** As you learned in Chapter 5, an entire essay can be organized using chronological, spatial, or emphatic order (pages 55–56). These strategies can also be used to make a paragraph coherent.

Imagine you plan to write an essay showing the difficulties many immigrants face when they first come to this country. Let's consider how you might structure the essay's supporting paragraphs, particularly the way each paragraph's organizational approach can help you arrange ideas in a logical, easy-to-follow sequence.

One paragraph, focused by the topic sentence "The everyday life of a typical immigrant family is arduous," might be developed through a **chronological** account of the family's daily routine: purchasing, before dawn, fruits and vegetables for their produce stand; setting up the stand early in the morning; working there for ten hours; attending English class at night. Another paragraph might develop its topic sentence—"Many immigrant families get along without the technology that others take for granted"—through **spatial** order, taking readers on a brief tour of an immigrant family's rented home: the kitchen lacks a dishwasher or microwave; the living room has no stereo, computer, or VCR, only a small black-and-white TV; the basement has just a washtub and clothesline instead of a washer and dryer. Finally, a third paragraph with the topic sentence "A number of worries typically beset immigrant families" might use an **emphatic** sequence, moving from less significant concerns (having to wear old, unfashionable clothes) to more critical issues (having to deal with isolation and discrimination).

**Signal Devices.** Once you determine a logical sequence for your points, you need to make sure that readers can follow the progression of those points within and between paragraphs. **Signal devices** provide readers with cues, reminding them where they have been and indicating where they are going.

Try to include some signals—however awkward or temporary—in your first draft. If you find you *can't*, that's probably a warning that your ideas may not be arranged logically—in which case, it's better to find that out now rather than later on.

Useful signal devices include *transitions*, *bridging sentences*, *repeated words*, *synonyms*, and *pronouns*. Keep in mind, though, that a light touch should be your goal with such signals. Too many call attention to themselves, making the essay mechanical and plodding.

- Transitions.** Words and phrases that ease readers from one idea to another are called **transitions**. Among such signals are the following:

| Time                      | Space      | Addition      | Examples      |
|---------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| first                     | above      | moreover      | for instance  |
| next                      | below      | also          | for example   |
| during                    | next to    | furthermore   | to illustrate |
| finally                   | behind     | in addition   | specifically  |
| Contrast                  | Comparison | Summary       |               |
| but                       | similarly  | therefore     |               |
| however                   | also       | thus          |               |
| in contrast               | likewise   | in short      |               |
| on the one/<br>other hand | too        | in conclusion |               |

Note how the underlined transitions in the following paragraph provide clear cues to readers, showing how ideas fit together:

Although the effect of air pollution on the human body is distressing, its effect on global ecology is even more troubling. In the Bavarian, French, and Italian Alps, for example, once magnificent forests are slowly being destroyed by air pollution. Trees dying from pollution lose their leaves or needles, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. During this process, grass prospers in the increased light and pushes out the native plants and moss that help hold rainwater. The soil thus loses absorbency and becomes hard, causing rain and snow to slide over the ground instead of sinking into it. This, in turn, leads to erosion of the soil. After a heavy rain, the eroded land finally falls away in giant rockslides and avalanches, destroying entire villages and causing life-threatening floods.

2. **Bridging sentences.** Although **bridging sentences** may be used within a paragraph, they are more often used to move readers from one paragraph to the next. Look again at the first sentence in the preceding paragraph on pollution. Note that the sentence consists of two parts: The first part reminds readers that the previous discussion focused on pollution's effect on the body; the second part tells readers that the focus will now be pollution's effect on ecology.
3. **Repeated words, synonyms, and pronouns.** The **repetition** of important words maintains continuity, reassures readers that they are on the right track, and highlights key ideas. **Synonyms**—words similar in meaning to key words or phrases—also provide coherence, while making it possible to avoid unimaginative and tedious repetitions. Finally, **pronouns** (*he, she, it, they, this, that*) enhance coherence by causing readers to think back to the original word (antecedent) the pronoun replaces. When using pronouns, however, be sure there is no ambiguity about antecedents. (See pages 673–674 in the Handbook.)

The following paragraph uses repeated words (underlined once), synonyms (underlined twice), and pronouns (underlined three times) to integrate ideas:

Studies have shown that color is also an important part of the way people experience food. In one study, individuals fed a rich red tomato sauce didn't notice it had no flavor until they were nearly finished eating. Similarly, in another experiment, people were offered strangely colored foods: gray pork chops, lavender mashed potatoes, dark blue peas, dessert topped with yellow whipped cream. Not one of the subjects would eat the strange-looking food, even though it smelled and tasted normal.

## Write Other Paragraphs in the Essay's Body

Paragraphs supporting the thesis are not necessarily the only kind in the body of an essay. You may also include paragraphs that give background information or provide transitions.

### Background Paragraphs

Usually found near the essay's beginning, **background paragraphs** provide information that doesn't directly support the thesis but that helps the reader understand or accept the discussion that follows. Such paragraphs may consist of a definition, brief historical overview, or short description. For example, in the student essay "Salt Marsh" on pages 164–166 the paragraph following the introduction defines a salt marsh and summarizes some of its features. This background information serves as a lead-in to the detailed description that makes up the rest of the essay.

Because you don't want to distract readers from your essay's main point, background paragraphs should be kept as brief as possible. In a paper outlining a program that you believe your college should adopt to beautify its grounds, you would probably need a background paragraph describing typical campus eyesores. Too lengthy a description, though, would detract from the presentation of your step-by-step program.

### Transitional Paragraphs

Another kind of paragraph, generally one to three sentences long, may appear between supporting paragraphs to help readers keep track of your discussion. Like the bridging sentences discussed earlier in the chapter, **transitional paragraphs** usually sum up what has been discussed so far and then indicate the direction the essay will take next.

Although too many transitional paragraphs make writing stiff and mechanical, they can be effective when used sparingly, especially in essays with sharp turns in direction. For example, in a paper showing how to purchase a car, you might start by explaining the research a potential buyer should do beforehand: Consult publications like *Consumer Reports*; check performance records published by the automotive industry; call several dealerships for price information. Then, as a transition to the next section—how to negotiate at the dealership—you might provide the following paragraph:

Once you have armed yourself with the necessary information, you are ready to meet with a salesperson at the showroom. Your experience at the dealership should not be intimidating as long as you follow the guidelines below.

## Write the Introduction

Many writers don't prepare an **introduction** until they have started to revise; others feel more comfortable if their first draft includes in basic form all parts of the final essay. If that's how you feel, you'll probably write the introduction as you