

How to Make Yourself Understood

English I Online Materials

Tips for Writing Sensible Paragraphs

Unit 7

What is a “Paragraph”?



キーワード (key words)

パラグラフ (paragraph) トピックセンテンス (topic sentence) 支持文 (supporting sentence)
結論 (conclusion)

Tips for Writing Sensible Paragraphs

Unit 7 What is a “Paragraph”?

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Useful Japanese books on paragraph writing

Takashi Tsuchinaga, Satoshi Oku, and Jeff Gayman

Scripts and Annotations (スクリプトと解説)

Hello everyone. Welcome to the “How to Make Yourself Understood” video series, Unit 7. I’m Rick Siddle. I’m from Sheffield, UK, and I’ve been teaching at Hokkaido University since 2011. In this video, we are going to learn what a “paragraph” is.

Organizing your Thoughts

Imagine what you do when you try to communicate your feelings or thoughts in writing to someone else. One possible answer might be, “Well, I simply turn my feelings or thoughts into words just as I feel or think.” However, this idea of what’s inside you automatically being converted to the written word is too naïve, I’m afraid. Your reader would just get confused. That is because in many cases, what’s in your brain remains formless, disorganized, and hard to capture until it is organized into an intelligible form. That may be why you often hear people say something like “I know what I want to say, but it’s hard to put it into words!”

In order to voice your inner feelings or thoughts, you need to take the trouble of organizing your ideas by manipulating your language skills. That may be a challenging and time-consuming task, but if you skip this process, then your potential readers will have a hard time interpreting the disorganized language that you let fly automatically. Taking the time to organize your ideas is worth doing not only because it helps your reader grasp what you mean, but also because it can reveal any vagueness or inconsistency in your ideas. Trying to organize our thoughts can help us to think better.

Points

⇒「思ったままを書けばよい」わけではない

自分の思ったことをそのまま書いても読み手に伝わる分かりやすい文章にはなりません。頭の中だけで考えたことは、そのままの状態では混沌としているので、それを生のかたちで吐き出して相手に読んでもらおうとしても、理解してはもらえません。

書くということは、確かに時間のかかる面倒な作業かもしれませんが、頭の中の混沌とした思考を整理して、言語化し、理解可能な形に構成するという意識的な作業だと考えてください。さらに、「思ったまま書く」という態度では、自分で自分の考えを理解することも難しいと言えます。頭の中で思い巡らしているだけの状態では、自分が何かすばらしいことを考えているように思っていたのに、いざ、それを整理して言葉にしてみようとする、論理的につながらない箇所が見えてきて、「あれれ、こんなはずではなかったのに」と気づくことがあります。ですから、自分の考えを意識的に組み立てて言語化するという作業は、自分の思考を鍛えることにもなります。さらに言えば、**自分の考えは言語化することによって初めて他者に伝わり、他者からの批評をもらえるようになります。**そのような知的な対話、議論に参加すること、それこそが**学術論文を書くことの意味**なのです。

Organized Units in Academic Writing

Now that you know conscious organization of your thoughts is a must, let's see how to do that in academic writing. In order to do so, you use what is called a paragraph. I guess you remember the definition of a text: a sequence of sentences that form a semantic unity.

Basic Characteristics: Semantic Unity

A paragraph is the most basic unit of such a text. You can compare a piece of academic writing to a building. Just as a huge construction is made of small building blocks, so is a piece of academic writing made of paragraphs. Now, let's see the characteristics of a paragraph.

Paragraph

- 1. one single main idea**
- 2. each sentence related to the main idea**
- 3. indentation**

First, it contains one single content or main idea. Second, each sentence in a paragraph is related to that main idea. If you want to discuss two topics in a paragraph, for example, you have to divide it into two paragraphs.

In addition to these essential, semantic characteristics, a paragraph has a clear outward appearance. A paragraph is distinguished from what is before and after it by means of indentation at the beginning and/or empty lines enclosing it. This helps the reader see where a paragraph starts and ends.

Points

⇒ パラグラフとは何か？

テキストを構成する基本的な単位であり以下の特徴を持ちます。

- 1. 1つの main idea (主たる内容) を持つ**
- 2. パラグラフ中のすべての文はこの main idea とつながっている**
- 3. パラグラフとパラグラフの区切りは、冒頭の子下げや空白行の挿入によって表される**

したがって、1つのパラグラフに2つ以上の内容が含まれるということはありません。内容が2つあるなら、パラグラフも2つに分割すべきです。

パラグラフはこのように意味のまとまりであると言えますが、同時に、見栄え（レイアウト）の点では、上記（3）のような特徴を持ちます。

日本の小学校で国語教育を受けた人であれば、原稿用紙に書くときは段落の冒頭一字分を空けて書くようにと教わりましたね。（3）はそれと似ています。

Paragraph Components

Now let us consider the internal structure of a paragraph. The default structure of a paragraph is: it starts with a topic sentence, followed by supporting sentences and a concluding sentence. Let's look at each of these paragraph components one by one.

Topic Sentence

Supporting Sentence	Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence	Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence	Supporting Sentence

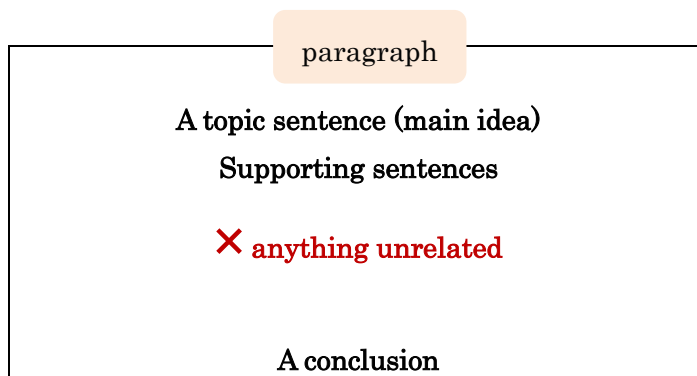
Conclusion

A topic sentence is the most important sentence in the paragraph. I hope you remember that a paragraph contains only one main idea. That main idea, or topic, is clearly stated by the topic sentence. It is in most cases the first sentence of a paragraph. This default location is important. Because a topic sentence gives orientation to the reader at the beginning of a paragraph, the reader knows the topic very early so that they can know what to expect in the rest of the paragraph. If the topic sentence doesn't appear until the end of the paragraph, the reader is kept in suspense, always wondering what the paragraph is going to be about.

Next. A topic sentence is followed by supporting sentences, which develop the main idea and make it convincing using a variety of methods: giving examples, proofs, reasons, details, explanations, making comparisons, restating the topic in other words, and so forth. If a topic sentence is an introduction, supporting sentences are the body of a paragraph.

Finally, a concluding statement closes the paragraph, reminding the reader of the topic of the whole paragraph. These three components cooperate to convince the reader of the one single topic and contribute to the semantic unity of the paragraph.

No digression is permitted. Do not put anything of no direct relevance in a paragraph.



Points

➡ パラグラフの構成要素

topic sentence: そのパラグラフの main idea (主たる内容=topic) を表している、パラグラフの中で最も重要な文。パラグラフ冒頭が定位置。

supporting sentence: main idea (トピック) を展開して読み手に納得させる働きをする文。topic sentence の次が定位置。

conclusion: 結論。パラグラフの main idea をまとめる。

これ以外の脱線的要素をパラグラフに入れることは厳禁です。

Now, let's look at an example paragraph and see the three components in action.

Listen to the following text first.

Sample Paragraph: "How I Changed the Way I Read"

For nearly a year, most of my reading activities have been on a digital basis. As soon as I buy books, I convert most of them into PDF files using a document scanner, and read them on my tablet PC. This method has several advantages. First, I don't have to carry along bulky textbooks from home to college anymore, because everything I need in the classroom is stored in my light-weight, handy tablet. Not only the textbooks but also my whole library is now accessible wherever I go. When I was totally dependent on paper books, there was a limit to the number of books I could carry along. In addition to this excellent portability, digital reading gives me more freedom in taking notes. As was the case with traditional reading, you can easily jot down your memos in PDF. Moreover, you can delete or modify them as you like, which is impossible with paper books. Although you might mention the danger of losing all of the books together with the tablet, actually, here again digitized books beat their paper-based equivalents. Because digital files are so easy to copy, I have made backups of my whole library on my laptop PC and in two hard-disk drives. You can say that my books are far more securely protected than paper books. For these reasons, I am very much satisfied with my present reading environment.

OK, let us look at the text. Oh! The letters are too small? Don't worry. We first just give you an overall view, and then look at each component in detail. The first sentence is the topic sentence. The main body consists of various supporting sentences, and we have a concluding statement at the very end of this paragraph.

Look at the first sentence. *For nearly a year, most of my reading activities have been on a digital basis.* This conveys the topic in a very general manner. The remainder of the paragraph, except for the final sentence,

are all supporting sentences, elaborating upon the topic in various ways.

The first supporting sentence is, *As soon as I buy books, I convert most of them into PDF files using a document scanner, and read them on my tablet PC.* This sentence expresses the general topic in a specific manner and makes the reader understand what "reading on a digital basis" is.

The second supporting sentence, *This method has several advantages*, starts the list of the advantages of digitized reading. The list consists of three parts. In the first part, the writer says that digitization makes it possible to carry a lot of books in a handy manner. The second part starts with *In addition to this excellent portability* and discusses how digital reading gives more freedom in taking notes. Here, the phrase *this excellent portability* not only introduces the second item on the advantage list, but also captures the content of the first part in a nutshell and thus helps the reader grasp the logical development.

[supporting sentences] **This method has several advantages.**

(1) ... handy tablet...

← cohesive

(2) In addition to this excellent portability,

The next sentence goes; *Although you might mention the danger of losing all of the books together with the tablet, actually, here again digitized books beat their paper-based equivalents.* This sentence introduces the third advantage; by mentioning a possible argument against digital reading first, the writer maintains that there is a valid counter-argument to it. The point of that counter-argument is made clear in the two sentences that follow: digital books are in fact far easier to back up than paper books.

The final sentence concludes the paragraph. *For these reasons, I am very much satisfied with my present reading environment.* Note that *these reasons* refers to the three advantages mentioned in the three groups of supporting sentences. This makes the entire paragraph a cohesive whole.

[supporting sentences] **This method has several advantages.**

- (1) ... handy tablet ...
- (2) ... more freedom in taking notes. ...
- (3) ... more securely protected

↑ cohesive

[conclusion] **For these reasons, I am very much satisfied with my present reading environment.**

We have just seen an example of a stand-alone paragraph, a single paragraph essay. You can use more building blocks, that is, more paragraphs, to construct a longer essay, which is the topic of the next video lecture. Before concluding this lecture, let me briefly mention some tips for Japanese students.

Points

⇒ sample essay の構成について

最初に topic sentence が来て、その後に supporting sentences が続き、最後に conclusion で締めくくるとい
う、**パラグラフ構成の常道に従っている文章**です。

冒頭の topic sentence、For nearly a year, most of my reading activities have been on a digital basis は一般
的な (general な) 言い方でトピックを述べています。読みやすい、説得力のある文章では、一般的な言い方の
後に、それを具体的に (specific に) わかりやすく説明する、という展開の仕方がよく採用されます。そもそも
topic sentence は、パラグラフ全体の内容を一文で表すため、一般的、抽象的な表現がよく使われます。そして
その後の supporting sentences で、topic sentence の内容を具体的な例や説明や言い換えなどによってわかりや
すく伝えるわけです。「**general なことを書いたら specific な説明をしよう**」と心がけてください。

⇒ sample essay の cohesion をもたらす手法について

著者はデジタル読書の第 1 の利点として、

First, I don't have to carry along bulky textbooks from home to college anymore, because everything I need in the classroom is stored in my light-weight, handy tablet. Not only the textbooks but also my whole library is now accessible wherever I go. When I was totally dependent on paper books, there was a limit to the number of books I could carry along.

と述べています。要するに、自分の蔵書をどこにでも持って行けるということです。注目していただきたいの
は、第 2 の利点を述べる文が、In addition to this excellent portability で始まっているという点です。第 1 の
利点を this excellent portability という簡潔な名詞句に凝縮してまとめ、それに加えて第 2 の利点は、という
具合に話を続けていますね。この名詞句により、第 1 の利点を述べている部分と第 2 の利点を述べている部分
が結びつけられて、cohesion (結束性) が生まれています。代名詞以外の語彙をうまく用いているわけです。
上の例では、「どこにでも運ぶ (carry) ことができる」という意味を表す portable という形容詞のさらに名詞
形である portability という単語を使っています。carry から portable (英語で意味を説明すれば able to be
carried)、さらに portability (= the quality of being able to be carried) を思い出せるような語彙力を活用す
れば、このような表現が可能になります。

Paragraph ≠ ‘段落’ in Japanese

The concept and definition of Japanese *danraku* does not seem to be the same as the standard notion of a paragraph in academic writing as we have just learned. So try not to use your logic of *danraku*, but rather try to follow the structure of a paragraph. This basically applies to writing academic papers in any field. Even when you write papers in Japanese, the basic structure of each paragraph should be like what we have learned in today's lecture. This, I am sure, will make your writing more intelligible, sensible, and reader-friendly.

Points

➡この unit で紹介した「**パラグラフ**」と、日本の国語教育を受けたみなさんが学んだ「**段落**」は似て非なるものであると考えてください。学术论文を書く際は、たとえ日本語で書く場合であっても、パラグラフ構成を取る必要があります。詳しくは下記 Further Tips(1) 「段落」についての補足」をご覧ください。

Summary

OK! Let's wrap up today's points. In this unit, we have learned the following. In academic writing, you organize your ideas and write using paragraphs. A paragraph contains one main idea, not more. Everything in a paragraph should be related to the main idea.

A paragraph is made of the following three components.

1. **a topic sentence, expressing the main idea of the paragraph in a nutshell, usually located at the beginning**
2. **supporting sentences, following and supporting the topic sentence in a variety of ways**
3. **conclusion**

Anyone writing academic papers in any language in any field should write on a paragraph writing basis. This will make what you would like to convey in your writing clearly understandable. Furthermore, understanding the basic structure of a paragraph also helps you read academic papers quickly and accurately.

What a mess! This is not a paragraph!

Now, it looks good. This IS a paragraph.

Well, that's all for today. I hope you enjoyed the lecture. Good luck, keep working hard, and see you next time!

~~~~~

## Further Tips (1)

### 「段落」についての補足

日本で国語教育を受けた人であれば、「形式段落」と「意味段落」という用語を覚えているかもしれません。簡単に言うと、形式段落とは、冒頭を1字下げることによって区切られた文章のかたまりのことであり、意味段落は形式段落がいくつか集まって作られた、1つの意味を持つ文章のかたまりである、ということです。

このような「段落」の概念はこの unit で学んだ「パラグラフ」の概念とは全く異なります。なぜなら、形式段落とは意味の区切りとは必ずしも関係があるわけではなく、単に見栄え（レイアウト）上の区切りでしかないからです。一方、パラグラフは徹頭徹尾、意味のまとまりですので、意味とは関係なく冒頭の字下げをしたような文章はパラグラフとは言えません。意味のまとまりとは関係のない形式段落というものがあるという考え方それ自体が、パラグラフの考え方と相容れないのです。形式段落と意味段落という区別があると教えられてきたせいで、意味のまとまりと関係なく、ただ何となくこのあたりで字下げをしたほうがいいかな、というだけで段落を区切るような癖がついてしまっているなら、学术论文を書く前にぜひその癖をなくしてください。そうしないとダメパラグラフを量産してしまいます。

この注を書いている筆者も、遠い昔に形式段落と意味段落の区別を小学校で教わったのですが、ふとしたきっかけでそのことを思い出すまで数十年間すっかり忘れていました。おそらく学术论文をたくさん書いている人の大半がその区別を忘れていることと思います。それほど、形式段落、意味段落という区別は、パラグラフ・ライティングによって構成される学术论文には無用のものと言えるでしょう。

そして、これは何語で論文を書こうが同じことです。自分は日本語を使うのだから、形式段落で書いてもよいのだ、ということにはなりません。日本語で書くにしても、**学术论文を書くのであれば、「段落」の概念によらず、「パラグラフ」の概念によって文章を書くべきです。**

## Further Tips (2)

### 英英辞典のすすめ

みなさんは、中学、高校と、英語の授業で、ある単語の同意語、反意語、別な品詞の形等の関連語彙を覚えさせられたり、意味を他の英語で説明させられたりした経験があると思います。実は関連語彙を思い出したり、別な表現で言い換える等の語彙力は、cohesive な文章を書く上で不可欠な能力だったのです。決して点数をとるための技術ではなかったのですね。このような語彙力を培うためには英英辞典がお勧めです。英和辞典に頼っていると、英単語と、それと意味が近い日本語の語彙との結びつきしか頭に入りません。しかし、英英辞典を使うことにより、ある英単語を調べると、それに関連するたくさんの英単語が否応なしに目に飛び込んでくるため、関連する英単語同士の網の目を頭の中に作ることができます。そのような言葉の網の目は、cohesion によってまとまった文章を組み立てる上で非常に役に立ちます。

## Further Tips (3)

### パラグラフ・ライティングについての参考書

上で述べたように、日本語の論文を書く場合にもパラグラフの概念は不可欠ですから、日本語による論文の書き方のマニュアル本にもパラグラフ構成についてしっかり解説してくれている良書があります。ここでは古典的名著と新しい古典とも言える本を紹介しておきましょう。

1. 木下是雄『理科系の作文技術』中公新書（中央公論新社、1981）
2. 木下是雄『レポートの組み立て方』ちくま学芸文庫（筑摩書房、1994）  
1 は理科系の論文に出てくるような文章を例文としていますが、2 は人文・社会科学系の例文が使われています。自分に合った方を読めばよいでしょう。
3. 戸田山和久『新版 論文の教室：レポートから卒論まで』NHK ブックス（NHK 出版、2012）





