

On the Job **WRITING**



BASIC EDITION

Lesson 13

In this lesson, you will learn to:

- Organize paragraphs
- Write for coherence

FORMING PARAGRAPHS INTO DOCUMENTS

Elisa works as a claim assistant in her state workers' compensation office. Her job is to interview workers who have suffered an illness or injury from their job. Because their employers are legally required to carry workers' compensation insurance, they are eligible for monetary benefits.

Each month Elisa writes a summary and description of the work-related medical problems of the people she has interviewed. She identifies those who are eligible to receive benefits. Her report is usually very long, and the reading is tedious. Since this report addresses a legal matter, she believes she should include many details.

Elisa's work is hectic and she always seems to be in a time bind, so, usually, she just starts writing as much information as she can find in her notes about each claimant. She also includes a list of who is already receiving benefits, the status of their medical condition, how their work is affected by the condition and the number of new claimants who are eligible for benefits.

One day Elisa's supervisor stops by her office and asks her to make the report more reader-friendly in the future. He says the report is often unorganized. That upsets Elisa because she's been doing these reports for over a year and no one has complained before.

Looking back through her last two reports, Elisa has to admit that, even she, is not sure what she meant by some of the things she wrote. The report does seem fairly mixed up, with some facts being out of place.



DEFINE IT! **Organize**

A logical or reasonable way to provide a group of information so it is easy to understand.

ARRANGE PARAGRAPHS IN PROPER ORDER

The New York Yankees' famous coach Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you're going, you may end up somewhere else." The same is true of a written document. If your paragraphs are not organized in a logical sequence, you will confuse the reader.

Business readers like to read a document once and be able to understand its meaning. Having to read a second time is frustrating and time consuming. As a writer, you are responsible for organizing paragraphs logically within a message. This is called being coherent.

An optician quickly wrote the following instructions for inserting contacts. Because she was in a rush, she failed to organize the sentences and paragraphs for coherence. How do you react to this message? Read the revised message to see an improvement.



Improperly Organized Paragraphs

Do the same things I am listing below with both eyes. Starting with the first eye, use the two fingers of your hand on the opposite side of your body to lift your eyelid up and down as far as you can.

Remove the contact from its container with a finger on the hand that is not holding your eyelid and pick up the contact. Wash your hands first. Don't let it drop or you will lose a contact. They are expensive, so don't spend more money than necessary on contacts!

Standing in front of a mirror, place a clean cloth on the counter so you don't lose your contact. Look at the ceiling and pop the contact right in. Blink a few times. Mission accomplished.

Properly Organized Paragraphs

Wash your hands carefully and stand in front of a mirror before touching your contact. With one finger, touch the contact and bring it toward your eye.

Using two fingers of the opposite hand, lift your eyelid up as far as possible and the area below your eye down. Look toward the ceiling and gently place the contact on your pupil.

Repeat the procedure for the second eye, and blink a few times to keep the contact in place. You have safely inserted your contacts.

The first version of the optician's message contains 48 more words than the second, and both the sentences within paragraphs and the paragraphs are out of order. The tone is too casual in places, with such comments as, "They are expensive, and you don't want to spend more money than necessary on contacts!" and "Mission accomplished."



Since both business writers and business readers are busy, why does it matter whether a writer takes the responsibility for organizing for the reader, instead of the reader figuring out what the writer means?

STEPS FOR ORGANIZING PARAGRAPHS

With practice, organizing paragraphs becomes easier. The five steps below will help you organize your paragraphs in a clear, coherent sequence.

Step 1: Plan what the reader needs to know.

Imagine your reader is sitting in front of you. What questions would the reader ask? Anticipate the reader's questions and provide the answers.

Step 2: Gather all the information you need before you write. Do you have enough details? What is the timing, cost and procedure for the project? What other details need to be given?

Step 3: Arrange information in the best order to be understood. Readers remember information longer when it is presented early in the document.

Step 4: Write each paragraph so it contains main idea or topic sentence and supporting details. Decide where to place the main idea.

Step 5: Organize the paragraphs in logical order. The most important paragraph comes first and is followed by supporting paragraphs of less importance. If the news is bad, in that case, the main idea often appears further down.

LESSON 13 ACTIVITY

Jamie Waymond, a technician for Reynolds Swimming Pool Service, has been asked by his manager to write a set of pool-cleaning instructions for first-time pool owners. Jamie considers himself a decent writer and is not afraid to take on this task. Improve the message by removing unnecessary words and reorganizing the sentences and paragraphs in a logical sequence.

With proper maintenance, your pool can be up and running all summer. You don't want to have to call for service just when you're ready for a swim or pay big bills because you did something wrong, so here is what I recommend for cleaning the pool surfaces.

Skim the water with a pool skimmer, but, first, check that no kids are in the water because you don't want anyone to get hurt. Several different types are available at different prices.

Run the pump, if you want to for about 8-12 hours per day. That helps prevent algae and bacteria growth, and running the water through the filter helps trap contaminants and other particles. The sound of the running water will help you go to sleep at night. Plus, good circulation mixes and disperses the chemicals throughout the system.

After you skim, brush the walls with a pool brush—again, there are a bunch of different kinds available. Vacuum all surfaces, especially areas that get little circulation. More to come, but this will get you started.