

MSFEA CREATES: EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

OBJECTIVE OF THE HANDOUT

This handout will help you:

1. Identify the characteristics of strong paragraphs.
2. Describe the structure of an effective paragraph.

TECHNICAL EXPLANATION OF EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

Readers do not read word by word and sentence by sentence. Rather, readers first look for the big picture that they then use to understand the details. Paragraphs are thus part of the whole that serve to build the author's argument(s).

A strong paragraph should be:

- 1) **Focused:** Focuses on one theme.
- 2) **Organized:** Starts with a “big picture” sentence, followed by relevant supporting details and explanations, and ends with a summary/evaluation.
- 3) **Cohesive:** Connects ideas using transitions and connective devices.
- 4) **Balanced:** Balances general statements with specific details.
- 5) **Varied:** Uses different tenses when reporting different types of information.

EXAMPLE TO EXPLAIN EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

(1) In this study, fine aggregate characteristics **were evaluated** according to ASTM C1X5X. (2) This standard lists three procedures (Methods A, B, and C) to measure the void content of fine aggregate. (3) While Methods A and C **use** graded fine aggregate (consisting of different sizes of aggregate), Method B **uses** several individual size fractions (each aggregate size is tested on its own for void content). (4) Depending on the method used, the measured void content **may provide** further indications of the aggregate's characteristics. (5) For instance, using Method A to measure the void content of an aggregate of a known grading, the results **can further indicate** the aggregate's angularity, sphericity, and surface texture. (6) On the other hand, when void content is measured on an as-received fine-aggregate grading (Method C), the results can predict the aggregate's performance (workability) when used in the field. (7) Therefore, various tests **should be conducted** under various conditions.

TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPH

Focused:

Revolves around one theme (fine aggregate characteristics that can be determined by ASTM C1X5X).

Organized:

Starts with a topic sentence that includes the theme.

Balanced: Balance general statements with specific details. Sentence 2 provides a general statement about the various procedures listed in the standard. Then, sentence 3 provides specific comparisons between the three methods.

Organized: Details and explanations relevant to the topic.

Organized: Concluding sentence that summarizes or evaluates the main ideas.

Cohesive: Underlined transitions (see underlined) enhance the flow of ideas and help achieving the known-new contract in sentences.

Varied in tense: Use different tenses when reporting different types of information. Notice the verbs in bold. Descriptions of the actual procedures conducted are reported in the past tense (were evaluated). However, the descriptions of the methods are reported using the present tense because they include general facts about those methods (lists, use, uses). Also, when discussing possibilities and necessities, modal verbs are used (may, can, should).

TAKEAWAYS

- ☐ Make sure your paragraph is focused on one main focus/ point.
- ☐ Make sure your paragraph clearly distinguishes between big picture ideas and supporting details.

Sources: Booth et al. (2016) “The Craft of Research”