

1  **Coherent and Unified Paragraphs**

1. To organize and develop ideas in a coherent and unified manner
2. Ensure that your paragraphs advance the story

2  **Coherence and Unity Defined**

- Coherence—the order in which the various elements are presented and the devices used to make clear the relationships between those elements
- Unity—a matter of keeping all of the elements of a piece of writing, whether a paragraph or a novel, centered on the primary topic

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A paragraph might be unified in its subject, tone, scope, style, point of view, character, scene, and tense, but unless all the logical connections between sentences within a paragraph and all the logical connections between paragraphs in a piece are clear, the total piece is not coherent.

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#### Examples of Logical Ordering

- Chronological
- Spatial
- From General to Specific or Vice Versa

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#### **Logical Advice #2**

**"Choose a suitable design and hold to it."**

Whether you're writing a short story, a sonnet, or a love letter, stick to the format. Your formatting signals certain expectations in your reader. When you stray from the format, your reader may feel "jostled." As long as you "jostle" your reader purposefully, you're not breaking any rules; however, you must have a purpose for doing so.

Example: The graphic novel *The Watchmen* interweaves a variety of formats—prose, comics, journal entries, police reports, newspaper articles, etc. It is done purposefully and each format continues to move a single story forward along a chronological timeline.

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#### **Logical Advice #3**

**"Make the paragraph the unit of composition."**

The length of paragraph can vary, though a single sentence should rarely compose a unit. An exception to this—dialogue.

Look at an example of paragraph length and division in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil."

What does each of the first five paragraphs of this story, regardless of length, bring to the story? If you had to cut one of those paragraphs, which would you cut?

7  **Paragraphs in Prose: Practice**

Study an example of varying paragraph lengths and contemplate the reasoning for each paragraph break by briefly reviewing an excerpt from Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "[Dr. Heidegger's Experiment](#)."

8  **Coherence**

Order your sentences logically, but don't be afraid to experiment. Eudora Welty typed her work, cut her work into slivers, and arranged sentences and entire paragraphs on a bulletin board with push-pins. When asked if she typed her work, Welty responded:

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The sexton stood in the porch of Milford meeting-house, pulling busily at the bell-rope. The old people of the village came stooping along the street. Children, with bright faces, tripped merrily beside their parents, or mimicked a graver gait, in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes. Spruce bachelors looked sidelong at the pretty maidens, and fancied that the Sabbath sunshine made them prettier than on week days. When the throng had mostly streamed into the porch, the sexton began to toll the bell, keeping his eye on the Reverend Mr. Hooper's door. The first glimpse of the clergyman's figure was the signal for the bell to cease its summons.

"But what has good Parson Hooper got upon his face?" cried the sexton in astonishment.

All within hearing immediately turned about, and beheld the semblance of Mr. Hooper, pacing slowly his meditative way towards the meetinghouse. With one accord they started, expressing more wonder than if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper's pulpit.

"Are you sure it is our parson?" inquired Goodman Gray of the sexton.

"Of a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper," replied the sexton. "He was to have exchanged pulpits with Parson Shute, of Westbury; but Parson Shute sent to excuse himself yesterday, being to preach a funeral sermon."

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Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume, and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue, and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh, "this same withered and crumbling flower, blossomed five and fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder; and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five and fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the Widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Dr. Heidegger.

He uncovered the vase, and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first, it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred, and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a deathlike slumber; the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green; and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

"That is certainly a very pretty deception," said the doctor's friends; carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer's show; "pray how was it effected?"