Research Article

Paragraph Alignment in Academic Writing: Theories and Practices

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Abstract

The study examines the issues surrounding the arrangement of paragraphs in academic writing while focusing on the relationship between the theoretical underpinnings of academic writing and practices. It aims to familiarize beginner writers with the theory of paragraph writing and examples in academic papers. The theoretical underpinning of academic writing and the regular application of the theory among the researchers support the internal validity for them. Informed by the theory of academic writings developed by Toulmin (2003), Anderson (2007), Bailey (2011), Zinsser (2011), and Greene and Lidinsky (2015), the issue is analyzed based on qualitative research design, drawing insights and data from secondary sources. The discussion shows that the problem of paragraph arrangement is related to writers' lack of consistent application of the theories in their writings. Based on the assumption that the base for academic writing is a paragraph, this study contends that researchers fail to structure their argument and justification in their paragraphs at the proper position to validate their logic because they lack sufficient theoretical reinforcement and practices. Arguments with warrants and evidence followed by a conclusive remark and the springboard are the prerequisites to render paragraphs sound, coherent, and organized in academic writing.

Keywords: Academic Writing; Coherence; Paragraph Writing; Single Focus

1. Introduction

Paragraphs are a compact block of thoughts in any academic writing. A well-structured paragraph lends coherence to the overall theme of a piece of academic writing and allows readers to grasp the argument that the author is discussing. Given this significance of the paragraph, academic writers must be familiar not only with the components of a paragraph but also be equipped with the efficiency of combining them logically. However, most academic writers, especially non-native speakers and nascent ones, struggle to communicate their ideas cogently because they fail to configure different features in their paragraphs.

There are two basic problems with such learners/students. First, they are confused about how to maintain consistency in their argument, and second, they cannot apply an argumentative line of thought in the paragraph. Technically, a paragraph is a group of sentences separated by indentation or spacing at the beginning, with a focus on one specific idea. Paragraphs are of different lengths based on the idea to be justified through pieces of evidence and examples. The number of lines of a paragraph are determined by the context, requirements of the evidence, and the justification of the evidence. If the paragraph does not convey a single-focused idea, readers lose their focus and become disoriented. In essence, a well-knit paragraph is a key part of an academic writing because it helps readers to follow the writer's argument and logic. Among the four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening-- the most important yet the most overlooked and feared element is writing. The second language learners are neither concerned nor oriented in honing their skills in paragraph writing. Academic writing entails several technical dimensions ranging from the selection of topic, research on the topic, organization of the text, revision to editing. The mastery of these essentials is acquired through passionate and extensive reading, training, and exposure. Second language learners, unfortunately, do not get exposure to these faculties. Baltrnic and Davus (2018) note that "Academic writing continues to generate anxiety among graduate students" (p.2). Consequently, they agonize in their academic and professional career. In the age of the digital revolution and proliferation of information, there are many pathways to access data; however, the lack of authentic knowledge, accurate learning tools, and proper academic guidance mars the quality of writing. Despite the availability of multifaceted information platforms, non-native speakers face significant challenges in online research.

For many such students, the first hurdle is identifying the precise and relevant topic they are seeking. The sheer magnitude of information often leads to confusion to pinpoint what is essential. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about reliable sources and inadequate guidance

severely impairs the quality of their writing. Additionally, students receive little support from their respective departments and instructors. These factors contribute to poor and haphazard paragraph quality and the overall academic texts. Factors such as institutional indifference and students' inability to manage online sources adequately ultimately hinder students' writing skills. It is essential to foster an open and supportive environment to empower such confused students.

This paper focuses on paragraph writing with specific attention to paragraphing theory and its components. A well-written paragraph resembles the features of an essay like an introduction, body, and conclusion. Although students have a fair amount of knowledge of what sentences and paragraphs constitute, they simply cannot produce a logical paragraph. The primary elements of the paragraph are the thesis statement, topic sentence, supporting details, evidence, examples, anecdotes and statistics, conclusion, and a springboard for the upcoming paragraph. These are the theories of a paragraph, but they need to be implemented to make academic writing trustworthy. Novice researchers face a significant challenge when it comes to crafting a strong and logical opening statement in their writing. Arif and Ali (2022) hold that many non-native speakers "are depicted as suffering from several issues and difficulties, mostly language-related, in their academic writing practices" (p. 6). Although they take pride in their creative skills and can articulate their feelings well, they often struggle to achieve the necessary unity, coherence, and balance in academic writing. The difficulty they encounter in forming clear and logical first sentences, coupled with inadequate supporting evidence, attenuate the strength of their arguments.

Furthermore, students frequently resort to abrupt transitions, which disrupt the flow of their work. Consequently, many come to view academic writing as a daunting task. It is important to recognize that the hurdles they face are not merely about writing length; accuracy and logical coherence are just as vital in producing high-quality, professional writing. Although all the paragraphs are important for a complete thought, the first and last ones stand out. The first paragraph, known as the introduction/lead, contains a thesis statement and tells the readers what they can expect in the text, and the last paragraph, known as the conclusion, summarizes key findings, reorients readers to the main issue, and wraps up the whole text with implications and recommendations.

The paragraphs in between them develop the main claim of the text with supporting details. Thus, given the significant component of academic writing in terms of providing coherence to the overall ideas, a paragraph has to be well-controlled and logically structured. To produce an organized paragraph, writers, particularly those who are new to the genre of writing and

research, need proper and sufficient reinforcement. Discussing the importance of adequate feedback, Baker and Westrup (2000) view that "writing and speaking are 'productive' skills and that we need to build up students' confidence by moving from controlled to guided activities" (p.70). By controlled activities, they mean instructor-controlled activities that help to boost students' confidence, and guided activities mean more independent practice where the students use their learning in practice. Students are required to write analytical and argumentative papers during their courses as a part of writing assignments. However, as the teaching and research experiences of the authors of this paper demonstrate, they lack even the basic knowledge and skills to compose a reasonably comprehensive paragraph. The present paper examines this problem through the lens of writing theorists, as pointed out in the Abstract. It is hoped that this research will draw the attention of the concerned stakeholders like students and instructors and contribute to improving students' overall writing skills and presentation.

2. Literature Review

Essential and critical aspects of academic writing are maintaining coherence and logical flow. Flow refers to the seamless transition from one point to another. It ensures that ideas are presented clearly and logically. Wales and Freak (2012) emphasize that "Successful communication is a flow-moving from one statement in a text to the next" (p. 2). Disruptions in this flow can hinder comprehension. So, flow is essential for learners and writers to guide readers through their arguments. By organizing thoughts systematically and using transitional phrases, writers can create a cohesive narrative that enhances readability and engagement. This focus on flow not only improves the quality of academic work but also ensures that complex ideas are accessible to the intended audience.

Academic writing is not merely a task but a process that allows scholars to explore new knowledge and build upon existing research. Khaled (2021) states, "Academic writing aims to convey new knowledge and build upon previous studies about philosophical ideas or concepts for a group of scholarly experts" (p.26). Engaging with prior research enables scholars to identify gaps in the literature and address them with innovative insights. This iterative process drives scholarly advancement and fosters intellectual growth. For newcomers, academic writing provides a foundational tool to develop critical thinking and growth. For them, academic writing provides a foundational tool to develop analytical skills and prepare for other disciplines. To achieve clarity and coherence, writers must adopt strategic planning and structured approaches. Common strategies include outlining, drafting, and revising before finalizing a paper. Lavelle et al. (2007) explain, "Common strategies include combinations of

activities such as outlining, drafting, or freewriting" (p.3). These steps help writers organize their thoughts, refine their arguments, and ensure that their work adheres to academic standards. Without such strategies, writing can lack structure and clarity, undermining its effectiveness. By adhering to structured writing patterns, the writers can enhance coherence and produce high-quality work.

Despite its importance, academic writing often generates anxiety and stress, particularly among graduate students. The significant time commitment and effort required can lead to decreased motivation and inconsistencies in work. Additionally, non-native English speakers face unique challenges due to language barriers. Omar, Yasser, and Ibrahim highlight that writing in English is difficult for both ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, as it demands mental effort to construct grammatically correct and coherent sentences. These challenges underscore the need for institutional support. Academic writing values objectivity and impersonal tone, distinguishing it from creative or personal forms of expression. Gurak and Lannon (2013) confirm that "unlike poetry, fiction, or essays, technical documents rarely focus on the author's thoughts and feelings" (p.5). To achieve this, writers must adopt impersonal stylistic choices that prioritize factual accuracy and logical reasoning. Furthermore, academic writing should be persuasive, incorporating Aristotle's principles of ethos, pathos, and logos. Stuart and April (2016) observe, "Ethos and pathos are concerned with the content of your argument; logos addresses both form and content" (p.751). While these elements can be challenging for beginners and non-native speakers, they are essential for the crafting compelling and the credible arguments. Non-native English speakers encounter significant challenges in academic writing, ranging from language proficiency issues to difficulties in adhering to complex writing processes. These challenges often hinder their ability to publish in high-profile journals despite the quality of their research. As Arif and Ali (2022) further explain, "Non-Native English Speaker's failure to be accepted for publication in high-profile journals is predominantly attributed to language issues" (p. 6). Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions, such as language training and editorial support to empower non-native speaker and recognize their contributions to academia.

3. Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative research design to interpret the nature and structure of academic paragraphs using secondary resources. It applies the common parameters of academic writing and states the logics for academic writing. The common examples have been drawn as examples to show the nature of logic, evidence, and citations. This study adopts the theories

of paragraph writing developed by Toulmin (2003), Anderson (2007), Bailey (2011), Zinsser (2011), and Greene and Lidinsky (2015) as the theoretical tool. Researcher-created examples are the pieces of evidence to validate the theory of paragraph writing.

4. Result and Discussion

Analysis and Interpretation

Mechanisms of a Paragraph in Academic Writing

Critical thinking generates new ideas for the learners that, in turn, lead to research. The preliminary step of the researcher is to sense a problem and make a systematic move toward resolution through rigorous steps. Bailey (2011) highlights problem-solving through critical thinking: "Critical thinking means not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but instead actively questioning and assessing it" (p.27). Problems detecting, confirming the purpose, and reading the current publication form the stepping stone to commence the research. The habit of questioning leads to the success of academic writing. A logical answer to curiosity through valid and rigorous structure is the most important factor for the research, for which researchers have to be familiar with scheduling from the beginning to the end phase of the writing. Such a structured approach enables researchers to construct logical answers to the issues they are involved.

The introductory part of the research has to entail a point to be discussed. This is the argumentative thought in the introductory part of the research. The succeeding paragraphs move on to justify the logic of the first paragraph. Novelty in thought and style has to be continued from the introductory section of the study. The structure and the content of the paper are enhanced through the effective introductory paragraph structures. Greene and Lidinsky (2015) support the line of thought that the first paragraph's structure is the crux of the research: "The introduction is where you set up your argument" (p.257) and subsequent "paragraphs that follow your introduction carry the burden of evidence in your argument." Therefore, the first paragraph of the research hooks the succeeding paragraphs of the research paper. Readers' curiosity to read the succeeding paragraphs depends on the initial paragraph. If it does not draw attention, the curiosity dies, and the writing does not draw readers. Consequently, there is the death of the article due to the passive response of the readers. The passive response arises if the paragraph is not well-written. A well-written paragraph is not only the container of the information but rather follows chronological steps. Writing and supporting an idea demands critical thinking. Critical thinking supports analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas. The placement of argument and counterargument engages the paragraph logically. Therefore, paragraph writing demonstrates critical thinking.

Logic in Paragraph Writing

Bhawani Bhikschu's story "Ke Tyo Pheri Pharkela?" critically remarks on Yatri's priority to the female's youthful hue in response to female protagonist Sani's love and compassion for him. (Lead Line). Traveler is a typical male who judgmentally shows the "male gaze," having unnatural and abnormal constant looks at Sani's appearances due to which he bluntly comments on her physicality after intervals of their first meeting. (Reason) Sani falls in love with Yatri (the traveler), but he begins the voyage by leaving Sani's house early in the morning, residing there for one night. The reason was the traveler's priority to her charming body. When he departed, she was sad and went through a difficult time waiting for his return. But he didn't come back. She visited her mother's home one day after marriage in a nearby village. That same day, a traveler suddenly materialized in front of her. He returned as a tourist once again to the same place. (General evidence) The man seeks to identify Sani as soon as he sees her and finally remarks, "Timi ta Budhi Bhaisakichau" (p, 80), which means "Sani, you got old" (Citation Evidence).

The male-dominated patriarchal phenomenon expects women to be beautiful like ripened fruits in their youth, and their bodies should be attractive in a symmetrical manner. (Warrant) Ultimately, she realizes that he values her physical charm, and her loss of the charm and fascination distracts him. His statement shakes her ground, and she feels cold inside her body and heart even though the weather of outside is sunny and warm. Eventually, she realizes that he was never there for her and now also not for her but for her charm. So, Sani, as a symbolic representation, shows a societal structure to format women's image and identity. (Conclusion). In academic writing, the last sentence of a paragraph signals the upcoming paragraph. This is the springboard sentence.

The argument formation is the crucial step to enliven the thought of the study because it is the assertion of the researcher that comes out of the gap in the current study. To develop the curiosity of the readers. Greene and Lidnisky discuss the nature of the claim in research (2015, p.55): "A claim is an assertion of fact or belief that needs to be supported with evidence." The claim needs to be backed up through examples, evidence, and warrants in research.

Evidence in content analysis is the textual evidence that bears the proof related to characters, plot, setting, and rhetorical devices. However, in empirical research, evidence from the field through graphs and charts are the justifying points. The strength of the claim lies in its internal structure: as Toulmin, (2003) asserts, "An argument is like an organism. It has both a gross anatomical structure and a finer, as it were, physiological one" (p.88). Toulmin positions that

an argumentative statement is organic, structured like a human body, compact, and inextricably linked to each organ. Therefore, the reasoning is the thought, whereas pieces of evidence back up the plausibility of the assertion.

Argument in Academic Writing

The argument is strengthened through counterarguments in research writing. Both sides of the presentation develop debate in research writing and evolve inference. Out of propositions, inference evolves in the research writing. Anderson (2007) describes an argument as "a group of two or more propositions that express an inference" (pp.18-19). Inference is the result of the debate between two propositions.

It must integrate implication at the end that produces plausibility in the expression. Anderson (2007) articulates, "When an argument is deployed, the intent is to give reasons to support a claim" (p.62). The argument backed with reasons and pieces of evidence deserves plausibility. A well-formulated claim develops the following of the writing. Therefore, the placement of the claim with evidence supports paragraph writing for the paragraph structure. It is the intellectuals, thinkers, and writers who have exclusively played a vital part in bringing about a revolutionary transformation in society. An epoch-making transformation like the French Revolution would not have taken place if the intellectuals of the time had not stirred the national consciousness and spirit of the people of the time. As a part of the political program of integrating the whole of nationalities into one unified and organic whole, literary writers have imagined and disseminated uniform symbolic national icons through their creative writings. The burgeoning publication of books or periodicals also had a great deal in consolidating and strengthening the nationalistic spirit of the otherwise politically shy people. (Example of the beginning argumentative paragraph of Academic writing).

Evidence in a Paragraph of Academic Writing

The man sought to identify Sani as soon as he saw her and finally remarked, "Timi ta Budhi Bhaisakichau".(p. 80), which means "Sani, you got old" (Citation Evidence). To make the argument strong, the counterargument is equally important. Greene and Lidinsky (2015, p.2) state the feature of the academic argument as the one that does not stimulate quarrels with others: "Academic argument is not shouting down an opponent. Instead, it is the careful expression of an idea or perspective based on reasoning." The counterargument is equally important for the readers to create the plausibility of the two sides of the same point.

Greene and Lidinsky (2015, p.66) point out that "A counter-argument is an argument raised in response to another argument." Booth et al. (2016) state that "In research argument, you make a claim, back it with reasons supported by evidence, acknowledge and respond to other views, and sometimes explain your principles of reasoning" (p.110). Booth et al. highlight the significance of argument (2016): "At the core of every research argument is the answer to your research question, the solution to your problem's main claim" (p.111). The interaction between argument and counterargument develops logical inference.

Counterargument in Academic Writing

The following paragraph is an example of a counterargument in the academic writing since it deals with the argument in opposition. Despite the assumptions that the media owners exercise unrestrained power to frame events in a way favorable to them, they also allow people plenty of space to raise different issues of their concerns. The mass media facilitate the existence and formation of public opinions and beliefs by offering them a public sphere. This generates public opinion, which can have a substantial impact on the formation of state policy and national agenda (**Example of Counterargument**).

The first sentence is very important because it develops interest among the learners to move to the upcoming sentences of the paragraph. Zinsser (2001) articulates the importance of the first sentence, "If it does not induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead" (p.55). The opening sentence directs the paragraph, whereas the closing sentence reflects the idea of the paragraph. Greene and Lidinsky, (2015) assert "The first and last sentences of paragraphs will alert you to the shape and direction of an author's argument" (p.158). The liveliness of the paragraph is retained through the uniform line of thought from the first to the subsequent sentences. He appeals to maintain consistency in all the sentences of the paragraph.

First Sentence in an Academic Paragraph

The researcher has to use an all-encompassing argument in the paragraph. "A sound argument" Toulmin (2003) articulates that "a well-grounded on firmly-backed claim" (p.8). The reason needs supporting concepts, warrants, and examples. Greene and Lidinsky (2015) define claims as "Assertions that authors must justify and support with evidence and good reason" (p.37). Shreds of evidence and reasoning are important points for paragraph writing. Discussion is one important aspect of the research through presentation since it disseminates the new ideas in paragraphs.

Maintaining a single focus in a paragraph is a challenge to second-language users because of their inclination to justify multiple arguments in one paragraph. Students need not focus a single focus in the writing. Greene and Lidinsky (2015) talk about the three essentials of a paragraph, "topic sentence, unity, and adequate development," (p.265) and further state to "maintain single focus" (p. 275) in a paragraph so that readers are familiar with the evidence and anecdotes of a single idea. Maintaining a single focus is the main aspect of paragraph writing. Children's cognitive growth and social relationships are largely affected by the amount of time they spend watching different video content and playing with their peers. (Example of the first sentence)

Lead Line in Academic Paragraph

Bhawani Bhikschu's story "Ke Tyo Pheri Pharkela?" critically remarks on Yatri's priority to the female's youthful hue in response to female protagonist Sani's love and compassion for him. (Lead Line). The first sentence is as important as the last springboard sentence in a paragraph. Bailey (2011) discusses the structure of the passage: "The first sentence introduces the topic, other sentences may give definitions, examples, information, reasons, restatements, and summaries" (p. 78). A well-structured paragraph is similar to a well-structured composition.

The last sentence of the paragraph summarizes the idea of the paragraph and entails the ideas of the upcoming paragraph. This is known as the springboard in academic writing. Gurak and Lannon (2013) argue that "Unless you have good reason to place it elsewhere, the topic sentence should appear first in the first paragraph" (pp.92-93) Therefore, the lead sentence and its placement are very important in technical writing to bind the thought and manage the single focus. Zinsser (2011) emphasizes the importance of the sentence at the level of the long article: "Learning how to organize a long article is just as important as learning how to write a clear and pleasing sentence" (p.265). The initial sentence gives a new idea, whereas the final sentence of the paragraph announces the thought to be carried out in the upcoming section. Booth et al. (2016) state, "Open each paragraph with a sentence or two that signal its key concepts" (p.195). The educators have to disseminate that the length and structure of the paragraph are important because a very short paragraph fails to justify the logic and a too-long paragraph digresses the ideas. Justification of the argument through logic, graphs, charts, and diagrams varies from discipline to discipline. However, in this section, the researcher has to prove the objectives or hypothesis through testing logic. In quantitative research, testing is possible through numerical analysis, whereas in qualitative research, shreds of evidence, examples, warrants, and arguments are the parameters for the

justification. There are three basic elements of paragraph structure: direction, coherence, and emphasis (Heffernan and. Lincoln,176). For them, a paragraph contains these elements to manage theoretical underpinnings and practical aspects

Direction of a Paragraph

An effective and well-directed paragraph keeps readers engaged from beginning to end. It starts with a lead/topic sentence that tells the main points, and the following sentences support the topic sentence with details and sum up the paragraph with inference. Just like a fisherman uses a hook to lure the fish, the author can use a hook to attract the readers' attention. He/she can begin a paragraph with a question, a quote, descriptive language, or the main topic (Colonna and Gilbert, p.35). Well-structured paragraphs direct the readers with the unity of dominance. Beginning with a topic sentence and maintaining a single focus using transitional words triggers the hook of a paragraph. Some common transitional words are, so, therefore, although, however, thus, as a result, as soon as instead, and since.

Example of Direction

Although the task of restructuring the educational system and policy in Nepal entails a massive challenge now, in my opinion, the government should play an instrumental role in forming a committee of education experts and political actors that will chart out a clear-cut vision about the prospective education system in the country. Since we are moving towards making an inclusive society, a mobile unit should be formed that will visit different parts of the country and collect feedback from teachers, students, and guardians. If we are talking about free education, the country must be liberated from the clutches of corruption.

Coherence in a Paragraph

Just as a thread binds flowers and elasticities a beautiful shape, the coherence in writing links sentences with sentences or paragraphs with paragraphs and provides unity and flow to a text. In a coherent paragraph, sentences are connected in such a way that in every sentence, from the lead to the topic sentence, readers have ease in finding the flow of writing. A coherent text puts the audience/ readers in the center and communicates the information to their needs and requirements. Coherence consists of logical coherence, clear topic sentences, use of transition, and supporting details to justify the major claims. Which creates the chain flow in the passage to express its message smoothly. Ultimately, coherent text generates unity and harmony in the texts, which build clear communication with their readers.

Example of Coherence

The journey to explain the riddle of life and the universe began with myths, long before science came into existence. In the beginning, man was desperate in his pursuit of the explanation of what they saw around them. Overwhelmed by nature, which was what Minno Masani says in Our Growing Family: "Red in tooth and claw," Man began to seek a way to explain the otherwise fearsome nature. This corroborates the fact that the first aid to explain things was the mythic vision. In other words, Man endeavored to tread on the untrodden path with his mythic conception of the universe, the first-ever attempt in a way that was quite revolutionary in its approach.

Emphasis in an Academic Paragraph

In a paragraph, all the information is not equally important. The important information should be emphasized/highlighted so it gets foregrounded. Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) emphasize "format and typography" and "grammatical structure" (p.169). Some of the common techniques for emphasizing the text are fonts, type size, spacing, white space, bullets, numbering, all caps, underlining, boldface italics, boxes, colors, and pull quotes. Alostath (2021) states the significance of diverse approaches to deploy in academic writing: "There must be more effective approaches to deal with graduate students' difficulties in academic writing that provide maximum benefits for students" (p. vii). The emphasis generates unity of thought to maintain readers' interest from the beginning to the end and make students successful in writing.

Example of Emphasis

Social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have a tremendous adverse impact on children's cognitive and social upbringing. Parents, teachers, and communities should decide the kind of media content to be shown to children.

5. Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been to cast light on the problems that non-native speakers have faced in their writing assignments, particularly focusing on their lack of producing a coherent paragraph. The findings show that there is a discrepancy between what writing theorists say about academic writing and how students construct paragraphs. Since academic writing requires special presentational skills and efficiency, students are required to produce writings that combine all the essential elements of a paragraph: topic sentence, evidence, argument, and conclusive remark. Failing to do so will simply foreclose any prospect for them to stay in

the academic fraternity and community. Inability to compose a comprehensive paragraph hurts the professional career. To update and orient students to the basic elements of writing, tested and verified techniques are necessary to involve them in the writing process. The command over language is important, and with English being the international language of communication, the mastery of academic writing skills is all the more required to prepare the potential researchers to gain access to a myriad of career worlds like business, education, academia, science, and technology. In this context, the significance of the paragraph writing rests on the well-structured lead sentence to logic in the middle and evidence to validate the argument. Evidence with valid citations elevates the credibility of the ideas in the paragraph and makes it a plausible piece of writing. The writers have to encompass these components in every academic writing to compose a logical and well-organized paragraph.

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