

Paragraph Practice

**Writing the
Paragraph
and the Short
Composition**

Kathleen E. Sullivan

Fifth Edition

PRACTICE

Writing the Paragraph and the Short Composition

FIFTH EDITION

MACMILLAN PUBLISHING CO., INC.
New York

COLLIER MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS
London

Copyright © 1984, Kathleen E. Sullivan.

Printed in the United States of America.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Earlier editions copyright © 1967, 1971, 1976, and 1980
by Kathleen E. Sullivan.

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
866 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022
Collier Macmillan Canada, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Sullivan Kathleen E.
Paragraph practice.

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English
language—Paragraphs. I. Title.
PE1408.S779 1984 808'.042 83-1027
ISBN 0-02-418340-7

Printing: 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Year: 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1

ISBN 0-02-418340-7

Preface

To the Instructor

The fifth edition of *Paragraph Practice: Writing the Paragraph and the Short Composition* has been revised to introduce a new chapter in Part I, "Practicing the Paragraph." This chapter, "Coherence and Continuity," provides text and exercises that should help the student to better perceive what a well-organized paragraph is; to see the relationship between unity, coherence, and continuity; and to put his improved understanding of the well-constructed paragraph into practice. In addition, this edition includes improvements in the text and exercises in Parts I and II as well as new model exercises in both the paragraph and the short composition. It is the aim of this edition to be clearer and more comprehensive than its predecessors.

With the expansion of Part II in the fourth edition, which introduced new chapters in organizing, developing, introducing, and concluding the short composition, *Paragraph Practice* has become virtually two little books in one. The first half of the book concentrates on the topic sentence and the paragraph, and the second half focuses on the thesis statement and the short composition. This expansion should make it possible for *Paragraph Practice* to serve the needs of a broader range of college students than it did in its original edition, as well as to increase the extent of its usefulness to the students for whom it was originally designed. This new edition also contains Appendix B, "Correction Symbols," which was expanded in the third edition into a mini-handbook of grammar and usage.

Like the first four editions, the fifth is a workbook designed not so much to *talk about* the paragraph as to provide models and exercises in *writing* the paragraph. It is intended to give the same experience with the topic sentence, the thesis sentence, and the short composition. The main theme of this workbook, as Professor Strunk might have put it, is *practice, practice, practice!*

Why practice the paragraph? The paragraph is ideally suited to meet the needs of college students who, for one reason or another, need extra practice in writing. The paragraph is comparatively short and contains many of the

basic elements to be considered in studying any form of writing. Because of its brevity, the paragraph permits frequent writing practice without overburdening either the student or the instructor. In addition, the brevity of the paragraph makes it ideal as a medium for controlled composition in which specific mechanics or techniques of writing can be studied.

Organization is the primary concern of this workbook. Organization does not come naturally to most students in college composition courses. Because it is unfamiliar and strikes many students as unnecessary pain, they often resist it. As a result, instructors frequently neglect it. Nonetheless, organization is vital to good composition. It is the aim of this workbook to make it as painless to learn and as enjoyable to teach as possible. Consequently, the book begins with relatively simple problems and proceeds, by degrees, to problems of greater complexity.

The order of the text and exercises in Part I that precede the actual practice of the paragraph may be modified. For example, the section in Chapter 3 called "Finding the Right Word" may be deferred as a refinement that digresses from more essential requirements of the topic sentence. It can easily be taken up later when, for instance, problems of variety and imagination are introduced in Chapter 7.

Paragraph Practice may be used in combination with other books, or it may serve by itself as a reader and as a workbook in composition. The subject matter of the model sentences, paragraphs, and compositions can serve as topics for class discussions and for written exercises based on the discussions that will be of genuine interest to both instructor and students.

The advice and suggestions of many people have contributed greatly to improving this edition of *Paragraph Practice*. I would especially like to thank Anne Anderson, Robert Nunes, Marion Trentman, and Richard Vietti for their understanding and help.

K. E. S.

Contents

1

Introduction to the Paragraph

- 1. What is a paragraph? 1
- 2. What does a paragraph look like on the page? 1
- 3. What is the difference between a paragraph and a composition? 3
- 4. How long is a paragraph? 4
- 5. How is a paragraph organized or developed? 4
- Summary 15

PART 1

Practicing the Paragraph

2

The Topic Sentence

19

- 1. What is a topic sentence? 19
- 2. What is the difference between a topic sentence and a title? 19
- 3. Is the topic sentence always the first sentence in the paragraph? 21
- Summary 21

3

Practicing the Topic Sentence 22

- Requirement 1. Be complete 22
- Requirement 2. Be clear 24
- Requirement 3. Be specific 26
- Requirement 4. Find the right word 29
- Summary 36

4

Coherence and Continuity 37

- 1. Picture a puzzle 37
- 2. Compare the paragraph and the puzzle 37
- 3. Make the paragraph coherent 38
- 4. Make a simple outline 39
- 5. Study two paragraphs based on outlines 41
- 6. Compare the outline and the paragraph 43
 - Exercises 43
- 7. Give the paragraph continuity 47
- 8. Use transitions 48
 - Exercises 50
 - Summary 55

5

Elementary Problems of Form and Organization 56

- Exercise 1. Explain how to do or make something 58
- Exercise 2. Explain how to construct or make something 59
- Exercise 3. Explain how you got your name 60
- Exercise 4. Describe someone's face 61
- Exercise 5. Describe a room in your house 62
- Exercise 6. Describe a picture in a magazine 64
- Exercise 7. Describe an interesting incident 66

Exercise 8. Support a general statement with particulars 67

Exercise 9. Discuss your neighbors 69

Exercise 10. Discuss your hobby in a special way 70

6

Advanced Problems of Form and Organization 71

Exercise 11. Discuss something in close detail 73

Exercise 12. Describe your sensory reaction to an object 75

Exercise 13. Write about your biggest problem in college 77

Exercise 14. Define and discuss a significant word or term 81

Exercise 15. Make a comparison by showing similarities 85

Exercise 16. Make a comparison (contrast) by showing differences 86

Exercise 17. Summarize a plot 88

Exercise 18. Discuss a character in a story 91

Exercise 19. Propose a change in the existing state of affairs 94

Exercise 20. Give one reason in support of your proposed change 97

7

Problems of Variety and Imagination 98

Exercise 21. Describe an unpleasant sensory experience 102

Exercise 22. Describe a pleasant sensory experience 103

Exercise 23. Describe an experience in flashback form 104

Exercise 24. Describe a moment when you found or learned something new 105

Exercise 25. Explain how or why you associate one thing with another 106

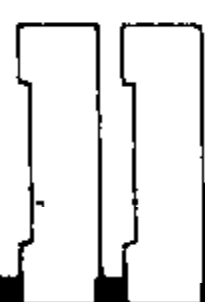
Exercise 26. Discuss a quotation 107

Exercise 27. Write what would happen if . . . 108

Exercise 28. Describe someone you see often 109

Exercise 29. Describe a famous painting 110

Exercise 30. Describe your reaction to illness	111
Notes on exercises in Chapter 7	112

PART

Writing the Short Composition

8

The Short Composition 119

1. What is a short composition? 119
2. What does a short composition look like on the page? 119
3. What is a title? 120
4. Why should a composition be organized? 121
5. How is a composition organized? 122

9

The Thesis Statement 125

1. What is a thesis statement? 125
 2. What is the difference between a thesis statement and a topic sentence? 125
 3. Where should the thesis statement be placed within the composition? 126
 4. Are all thesis statements alike in content and form? 126
 5. Do compositions always contain a thesis statement? 128
 6. Is the thesis always a single sentence? 129
 7. Is the division of the thesis statement always limited to two or three parts or supports? 129
- Summary 129

10

Practicing the Thesis Statement **130**

- 1. The most common form of the supported thesis statement 131
- 2. Other forms of the supported thesis statement 132
 - Summary 135

11

Organizing the Discussion **137**

- 1. Follow your plan . . . 137
- 2. Exactly! 137
- 3. The plan is the same, regardless of length 138
- 4. Weight or length of each part depends on the thesis 139
 - Exercises 140
- 5. Development within the paragraph must stay on course 141
 - Summary 141

12

Developing the Discussion **142**

- 1. Is anybody listening? 142
- 2. Think about your reader 143
- 3. What does it mean to develop? 143
- 4. Study examples 143
- 5. Do *not simply* make the discussion *longer* 147
- 6. Know your subject 148
 - Exercises 148
 - Summary 150

13

Introducing and Concluding the Short Composition 151

- 1. How is the introduction organized? 152
- 2. How is the conclusion organized? 152
- 3. Consider these introductory techniques 152
 - A. Dramatize or present part of an anecdote 153
 - B. Begin with a quotation 153
 - C. Surprise with an unexpected point of view 153
 - D. Begin with a question 153
 - E. Build background 154
 - F. Combine these techniques or simplify them 154
- 4. Make the conclusion short and simple 154
- Summary 155

14

Practicing the Short Composition 156

- Exercise 31. Write a portrait of a relative 156
- Exercise 32. Explain what you admire about a friend 159
- Exercise 33. Discuss attitudes or behavior you dislike 161
- Exercise 34. Discuss a good or bad job 163
- Exercise 35. Explain a rule by which you live 165
- Exercise 36. Present two sides of an issue 167
- Exercise 37. Describe an event in your life 169
- Exercise 38. Describe a place or scene 171
- Exercise 39. Discuss your experience with mechanization
and/or depersonalization 173
- Exercise 40. Discuss love 176

Appendixes 179

- A. Appearance and form of the submitted paper 181
- B. Correction symbols 182
- C. Paragraph evaluation 192
- D. Composition evaluation 193
- E. 300 words most frequently misspelled 194

1

Introduction to the Paragraph

1. WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is composed of a group of sentences expressing one central idea. A paragraph is complete in itself and is also a subdivision or part of something larger, such as a composition or a chapter in a book.

2. WHAT DOES A PARAGRAPH LOOK LIKE ON THE PAGE?

A paragraph begins with an empty space called an indentation. The indentation of a paragraph indicates where the paragraph begins. A composition, which contains several paragraphs, will have several indentations, making it easy for the reader to see where each new paragraph or idea in the composition begins. One paragraph, however, contains only one indentation because there is only one beginning point. Figure 1-1 shows how a paragraph should look. Indent—once only! Figure 1-2 shows a paragraph indented too many times.

3. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PARAGRAPH AND A COMPOSITION?

A paragraph is a part of a composition. Just as a group of related sentences composes a paragraph, so a group of related paragraphs makes up a composition. A group of compositions, in turn, can be the chapters that constitute a book. A book, then, is the largest unit; it covers more ground and is more complex than any one of its chapters. A chapter or composition is broader and says more than any one of its paragraphs. A paragraph is generally shorter, less complex, and expresses a great deal less than can a composition. Figure 1-3 may be helpful in showing how a paragraph and composition are related.

Notice that the subdivisions of the book, which are indicated by increasingly smaller circles, each within the other, have been extended to the smallest unit of all, the word. Thus the paragraph, as well as the book and composition, can be subdivided.

In your college courses you will need to develop skill in writing composi-

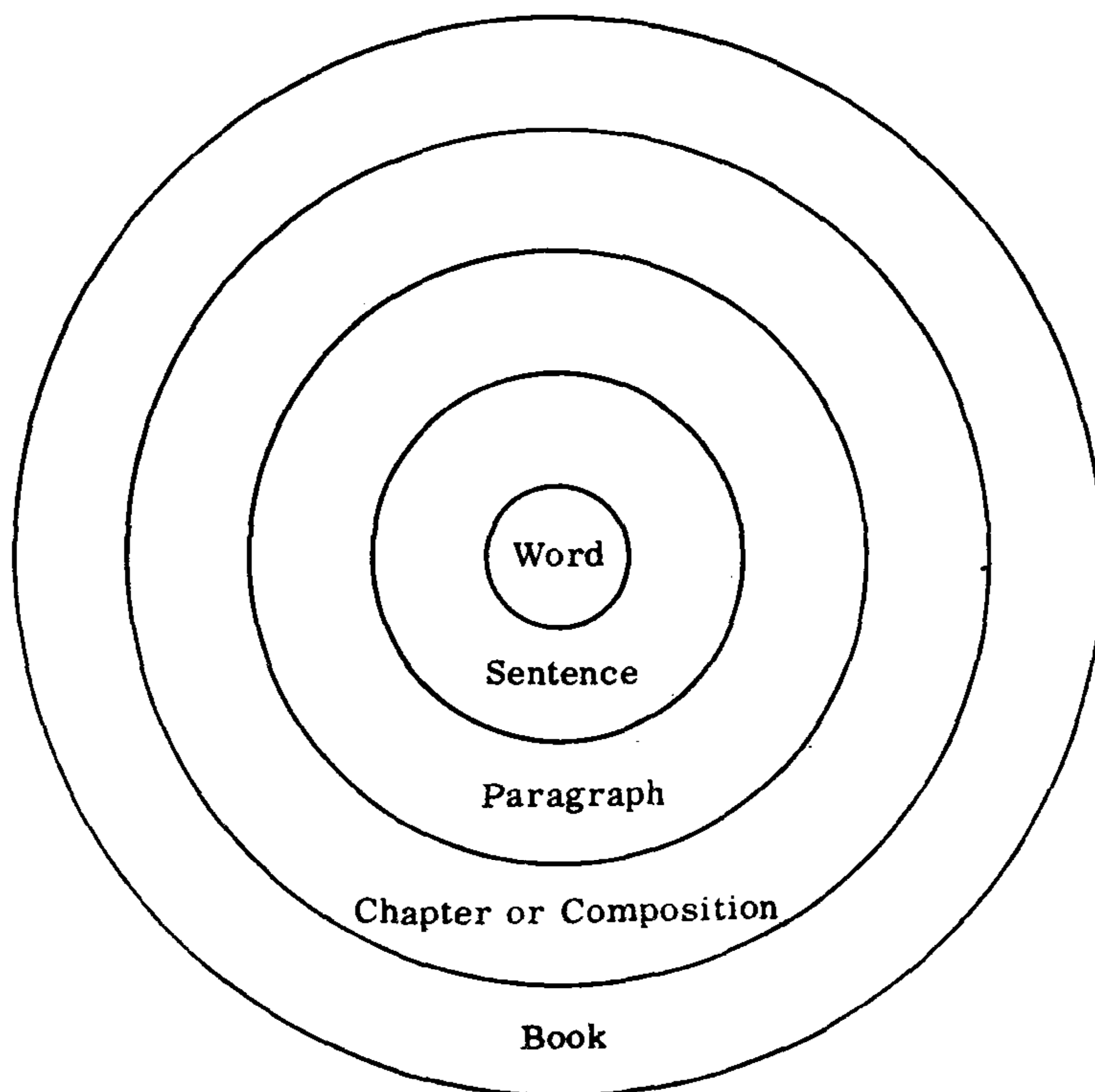


Figure 1-3

tions; therefore, it will be useful to keep in mind the relationship between a paragraph and a composition.

4. HOW LONG IS A PARAGRAPH?

If the idea of the paragraph is simple, the paragraph will usually be rather short. If the idea is complicated, the paragraph will probably be somewhat long. You should keep in mind this principle: *The paragraph should be neither so short that the subject of the paragraph is underdeveloped and insufficiently explained, nor so long that it tends to break down into too many subtopics that would be better organized into separate paragraphs.*

Paragraph length varies according to place and purpose as well as idea. In a newspaper, for example, where the column of newsprint is narrow, one-sentence paragraphs are common. Because comparatively few words can be contained in each line of newsprint, several lines are often necessary in order to print one sentence. To provide breaks or resting spots that make reading easier, newspapers indent or paragraph frequently. Purpose also determines the length of a paragraph. Newspapers, novels, textbooks, and college compositions each have particular purposes, and they use paragraphs accordingly.

Your paragraphs for the exercises in this book should be approximately eight to twelve sentences long.

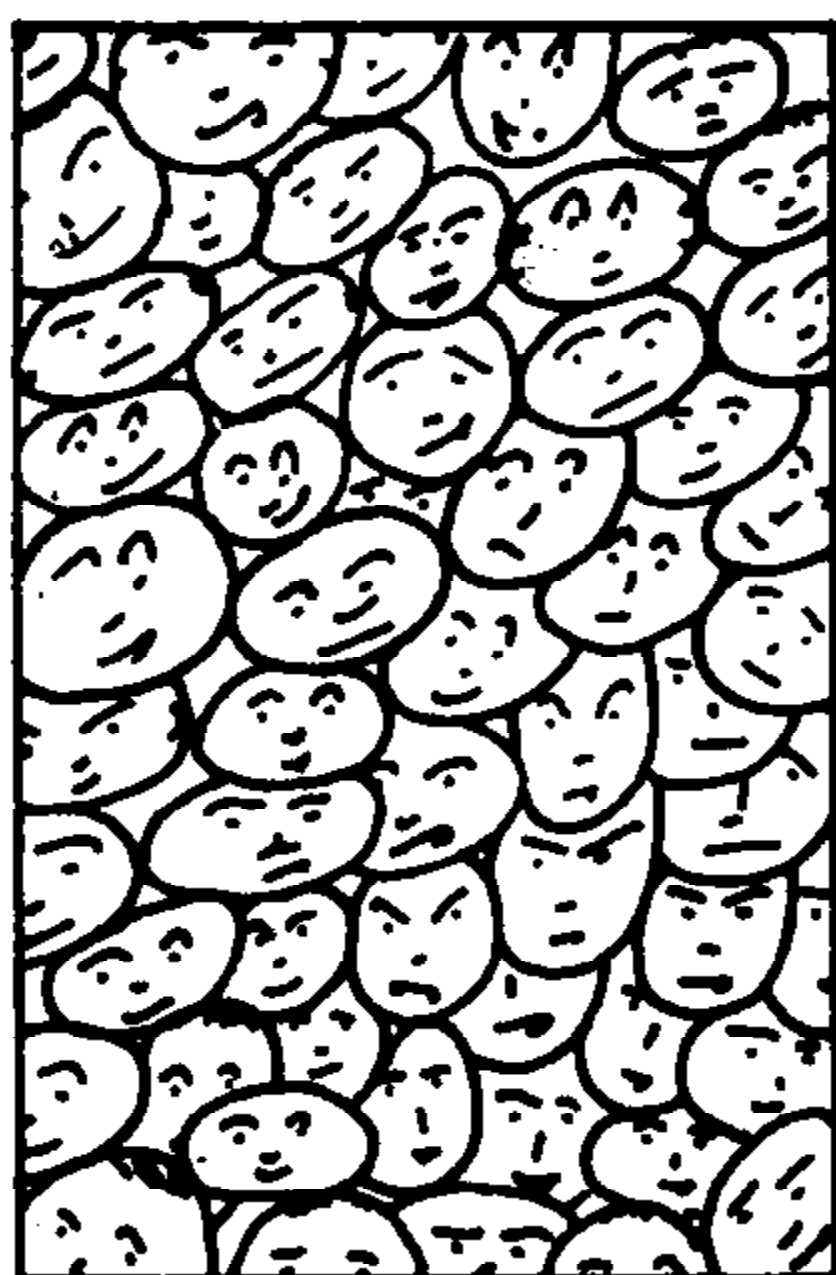
5. HOW IS A PARAGRAPH ORGANIZED OR DEVELOPED?

All paragraphs have one basic aim: to communicate a single idea clearly and effectively. All paragraphs, however, are not organized in the same way. *How* they communicate depends on *what* they wish to express. You will meet various types of “what” and “how” in the exercises that follow.

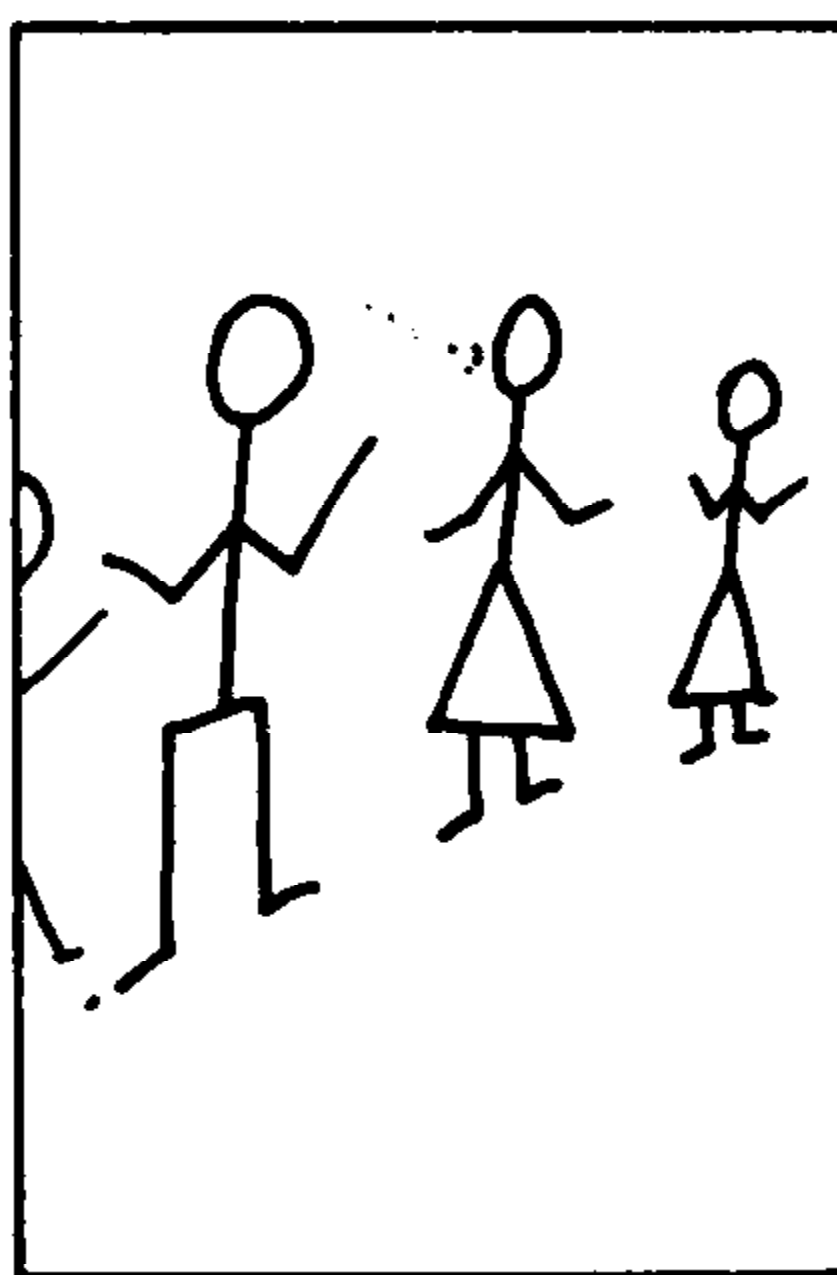
Although all paragraphs are not exactly alike, they all nevertheless have some things in common. Consider some of the factors that should be present in any paragraph.

A. THE PARAGRAPH SHOULD CONTAIN ONLY ONE CENTRAL IDEA

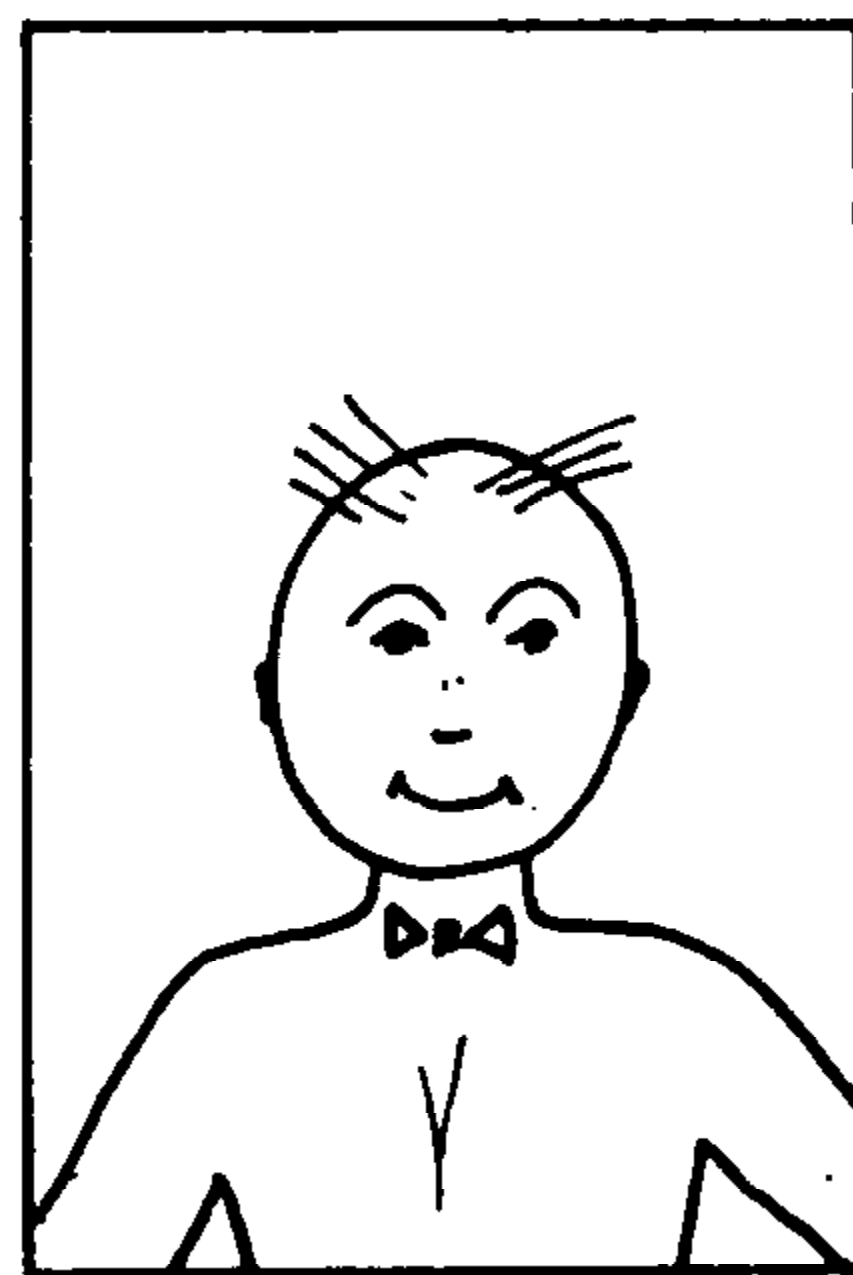
A paragraph with more than one central idea is usually overworked and tends to break down under the strain. *Limit* the paragraph. Limiting the paragraph is something like taking a snapshot with a small camera. You should not try to get everyone in your hometown into your picture. Even



Home Town



Family



Small Portrait

Figure 1-4

your own family is too large or too interesting for your paragraph-sized camera. You had better settle on one member of your family, and keep in mind that you cannot tell everything about even one person in a single paragraph of eight to twelve sentences. Make your picture a small portrait. See Figure 1-4.

Like a small portrait, the paragraph should be limited to one part of a subject, although the subject is probably much larger than the single aspect discussed in the paragraph. To illustrate this idea, suppose you are asked to write something about your house in a paragraph. You cannot tell all about your house. The subject is too big. Even your living room may be too large a subject to discuss in a single paragraph. You need to select a part of the room, such as your fireplace or your favorite chair. Examine the following paragraph.

EXAMPLE

My favorite chair is ugly, but I love it. It is a recliner. Because it is shapeless, heavy, and covered with horrible material, it is an eyesore in my living room. However, it is so comfortable that I would not trade it for the finest piece of furniture I might ever hope to own. There is nothing quite so delightful after a hard day at work as sinking my weary body into that chair. With my back eased into it and my feet eased up from it, I am in heaven. I notice other people like that chair, too. Whenever I have company, the first chair everybody heads for is my ugly, lovely recliner.

Limiting the paragraph is not an exact matter, but a useful rule of thumb may help you determine its approximate limitation: *the more deeply you go into a subject, the more the paragraph must be narrowed down or limited.*

A comparison of a paragraph to a camera is useful again. This time think of the process of enlargement. Suppose you take a picture of a standing figure. Then you decide that the expression in the face is good and that you want to see it in more detail. You decide to have that portion of the picture enlarged. Then you decide that there is something in the eyes that is fascinating (perhaps you see a mysterious figure reflected there) and that you want to enlarge that portion of the face. The closer you get to the subject, the more you see in it. Similarly, the closer you get to the subject in the paragraph, the more you see to discuss, and consequently the more the subject must be narrowed if you want to discuss in one paragraph all that you see.

Figure 1-5 may clarify the rule of limitation.

As Figure 1-5 indicates, the paragraph must narrow down or limit its subject to the degree that it concentrates on it or any part of it. Figure 1-5A shows the whole subject, but at some distance. Such a paragraph, although it may give an overall view, cannot go into much detail. Figure 1-5B represents a paragraph that, by limiting itself, can develop its subject more fully. Figure 1-5C shows further limitation that makes further or closer examination of its subject possible.

Although some of the paragraphs that you write may be like Figure 1-5A, your main aim is to develop skill in writing paragraphs like Figure 1-5B, or, in some cases, like Figure 1-5C.

Focus the paragraph. First, decide what the center of interest in your paragraph is and then make sure it is central and unmistakably clear. The following paragraph is focused.

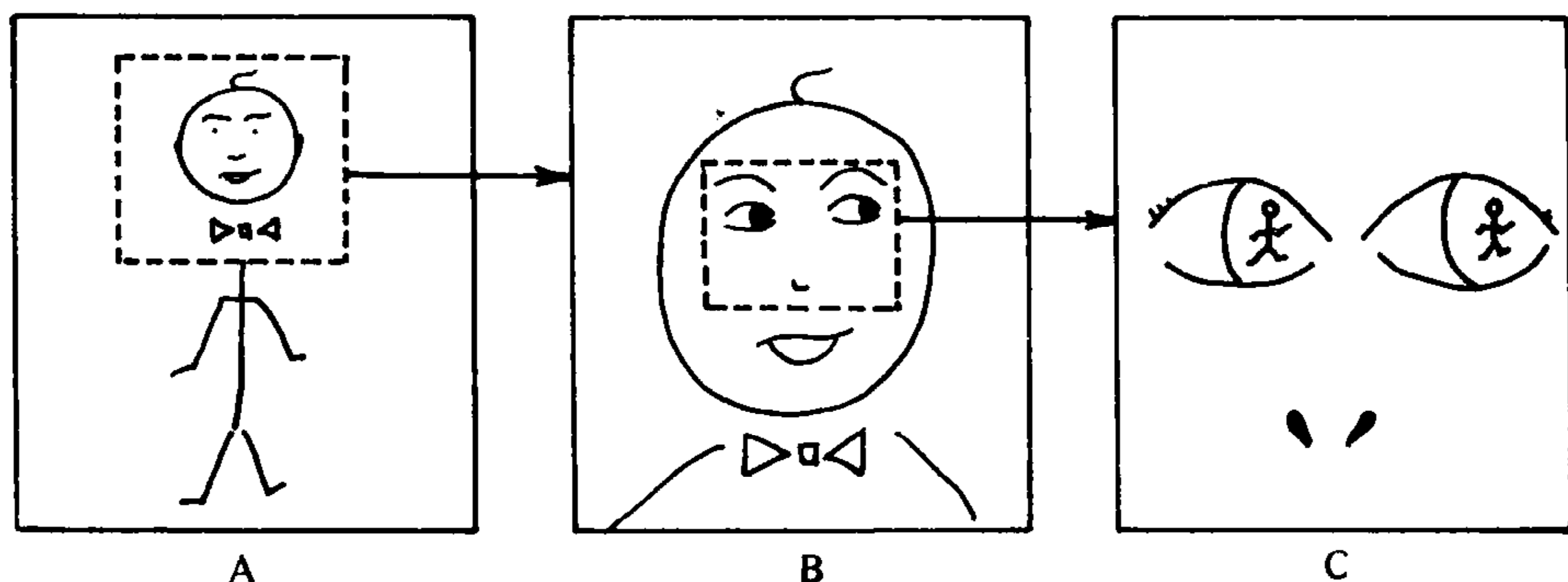


Figure 1-5