

University Writing Course



John Morley - Peter Doyle - Ian Pople

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**Express Publishing**

**Published by Express Publishing**

**Liberty House, Greenham Business Park, Newbury,  
Berkshire RG19 6HW, United Kingdom**

**Tel: (0044) 1635 817 363 - Fax: (0044) 1635 817 463**

**email: [inquiries@expresspublishing.co.uk](mailto:inquiries@expresspublishing.co.uk)**

**[www.expresspublishing.co.uk](http://www.expresspublishing.co.uk)**

© John Morley – Peter Doyle – Ian Pople, 2007

Design © Express Publishing, 2007

First published 2007

Sixth impression 2016

Made in the EU

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ISBN: 978-1-84679-366-0

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank colleagues at the University of Manchester for their suggestions and input into these materials, in particular: Pat Campbell and Bill Guariento for piloting some of the early versions of this material.

Thanks to all the staff at Express Publishing who have contributed their skills to producing this book. Thanks for their support and patience are due in particular to: Megan Lawton (Editor in Chief), Julie Baker Todd (senior editor), Steve Blake (editorial assistant), Richard White (senior production controller), the Express design team, and Tony Mason, David Smith and Timothy Forster.

We would also like to acknowledge all those who have allowed us to use material in this publication. A full list may be found in the bibliography on page 109.

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# Preface

This book has been written for current and prospective students of English speaking universities whose first language is not English. It is aimed at the large group of students, undergraduate and postgraduate, whose level in English may be at or around level 6 in IELTS or 560 (PBT) in TOEFL, and who still need to further refine and improve their academic writing. Adopting a general English for academic purposes approach, the units cover a broad range of key functional and textual areas. Each unit includes a range of authentic sample texts, controlled and less controlled writing exercises, and a reference list of useful phrases. The materials have been developed over a period of 10 years at the University of Manchester by authors with a total of over 40 years experience of teaching academic writing in a University environment.

John Morley  
Peter Doyle  
Ian Pople

## I. ORGANISING INFORMATION

The basic units of organisation in a written text are paragraphs. A paragraph normally contains several sentences which are all concerned with one main idea (or topic). In a well-written paragraph, the main idea (or topic) is expressed in a topic sentence, which is usually (but not always) the first sentence. The other sentences in the paragraph develop the main idea in some way. The whole paragraph should be coherent and easy to follow.

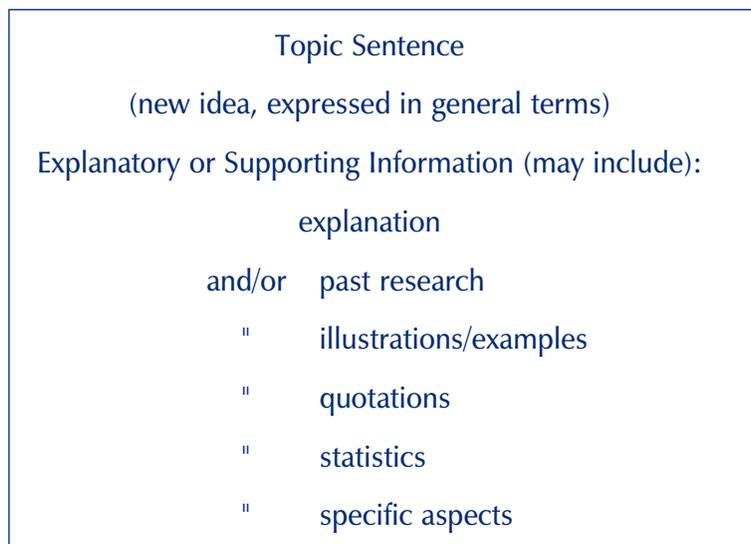
### 1 Introductory exercise on paragraph development

In the text below identify the topic sentence and reorder the sentences to form the original paragraph.

<b>a</b>	Finally, as the traditional means of communicating knowledge internationally, journals are accepted and recognised by scholars and researchers. They define what is important, maintain standards and also help to create an invisible college of those concerned with a topic.
<b>b</b>	They use technologies which are available to virtually every nation and to most academic institutions, regardless of age or level of development.
<b>c</b>	Through a well-established international infrastructure of library acquisition, new journals can reach concerned scholarly audiences fairly efficiently.
<b>d</b>	Journals have significant advantages as a means of international scholarly communication. They are relatively inexpensive.

### 2 Focus on paragraph development

The above paragraph has a typical structure that can be identified in many paragraphs: the topic sentence introduces the new idea, topic, argument or piece of information into the main text. This is then either explained further or supported by subsequent sentences. This structure can be represented like this:



It is important for the unity of a paragraph that the explanatory or supporting information should directly relate to the topic sentence and that only one main idea should be discussed. A new main idea should be treated in a separate paragraph. It is also important that the explanatory or supporting information should not repeat the general idea expressed in the topic sentence.

### 3 Exercises on paragraph development

The sentences in the boxes below (i-iv) are not in order. First, identify the topic sentence and then put the remaining sentences in order.

(i)

<b>a</b>		Britain lost most of its Empire after World War II, but even as the sun was setting on the Empire, the United States was simultaneously rising as a political, economic and military superpower. Thus the spread of English has continued without a break.
<b>b</b>		The widespread use of English and its current position as the world language is not accidental, nor it is attributable to any intrinsic linguistic superiority of English as a language.
<b>c</b>		Wherever the British acquired colonies, they brought English with them as the language of administration.
<b>d</b>		It began with the establishment of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

(ii)

<b>a</b>		Historically, this is because new foods and new ways of processing and cooking foods have arisen since the separation of the two nations.
<b>b</b>		The many differences in the terminology of transportation result from the fact that the railroad (British: <i>railway</i> ) and motor industries developed after the separation of the United States and Great Britain.
<b>c</b>		The vagaries* of fashion have caused divergence in the vocabulary of clothing.
<b>d</b>		Three broad semantic areas in which British-American lexical differences are especially noticeable are food, clothing and transportation.

\* = *unexpected, unpredictable changes*

(iii)

<b>a</b>		When a college student says that a certain book is <i>great</i> , it is more than likely that the statement has nothing to do with the value of the book judged as a work of art but simply means that he or she thoroughly enjoyed it.
<b>b</b>		By <i>extension of meaning</i> is meant the widening of a word's signification until it covers much more than the idea originally conveyed.
<b>c</b>		A box of candy or a chair may be <i>lovely</i> , and anything from a ball game to the weather may be <i>great</i> .
<b>d</b>		The word <i>lovely</i> , for example, means primarily worthy to be loved, and <i>great</i> means large in size, the opposite of small. But today <i>lovely</i> and <i>great</i> have no such meanings.

- (iv)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a | Cycling alters the anatomical position of the spine (to a flexed position), particularly the thoracic spine, and exposes the anterior portion of the vertebral column to higher compression.                             |
| b | Among cyclists, however, the most potentially serious of these disorders might be increased thoracic curvature.  |
| c | Children may become interested in competitive sport at an early age.   |
| d | Early involvement (prior to maturity) in competitive sports often exposes individuals to types of stress that may affect their growth, producing a disruption of the normal growth pattern (Frost, 1979; Watkins, 1999). |

#### 4 Exercise on dividing a text into paragraphs

In the following text the paragraph divisions are not indicated. Identify the topic sentence(s) and divide the text into paragraphs. There are three paragraphs in the original text.

Weather conditions in Saudi Arabia vary almost as much as the terrain. In the mountains that fringe the peninsula on the west, south and southeast, annual rainfall is about 50 centimetres and there are often torrential downpours and destructive flash floods; yet parts of the Rub' al-Khali may receive no rain for as long as 10 years. Over much of central, northern and northeastern Arabia, average annual rainfall is 5 to 15 centimetres and highly variable from year to year. Temperature and humidity ranges are equally disparate. In the interior the air is dry, while on the coasts, summer humidity is excessive, particularly at night. In summer, temperatures in some areas may reach 50° C (122° F) in the shade, but in spring, the days are balmy and the nights are clear. In winter, temperatures drop below freezing in the central and northern regions, and snow sometimes falls in the mountains, the northern plateau and even in the capital Riyadh. There are also strong winds, such as the prevailing northwest winds along the eastern coast – the winds called the *shamal* – which frequently whip up dust and sandstorms. The climate of the peninsula, nevertheless, is largely characterised by aridity and heat. As a result, the vegetation, wildlife and domesticated animals of the peninsula share one distinctive feature: a high degree of adaptation to the special demands of life in the desert. The ability of men to adapt and survive in this harsh environment has had important effects on the history of the peninsula and Saudi Arabia.



Figure 1.1. Map of Saudi Arabia and surrounding areas

## II. GIVING EXAMPLES

### 5 Pre-reading

- (i) • Why do writers give examples in their texts?  
• In what position in a paragraph would you normally expect to find examples?
- (ii) • Do you know any words in English whose meanings have changed with time?  
• How have they changed?

### 6 Reading for main points

Read the extract below and note two ways in which the meaning of a word can change and give one example of each.

(1) It has been observed that in their sense development, words often pursue certain well-marked tendencies. Among the more common of these are *extension* of meaning and *narrowing* of meaning. By *extension of meaning* is meant the widening of a word's signification until it covers much more than the idea originally conveyed. The tendency is sometimes called  
5 *generalisation*. The word *lovely*, for example, means primarily worthy to be loved, and *great* means large in size, the opposite of small. But today *lovely* and *great* have no such meaning. A box of candy or a chair may be *lovely*, and anything from a ball game to the weather may be *great*. When a college student says that a certain book is *great*, it is more than likely that the statement has nothing to do with the value of the book judged as a work of art, but simply means  
10 that he or she thoroughly enjoyed it. In everyday use these words have come to express only enthusiastic approval of a rather vague sort. Another illustration is the word *dean*. It has, of course, its proper meanings, such as the head of the chapter in a cathedral church or the head of the faculty in a college. But it has come to be used as a designation for the senior or foremost person of any group or class, so that we may speak of the *dean* of American critics, or, indeed,  
15 of sportswriters.

(2) The opposite tendency is for a word gradually to acquire a more restricted sense, or to be chiefly used in one special connection. A classic example of this practice is the word *doctor*. There are doctors (i.e., learned men) in theology, law and many other fields beside medicine, but nowadays when we send for *the* doctor we mean a member of only one profession. In some  
20 of the preceding paragraphs, especially those in which were presented examples of old words with new meanings, will be found a number of similar instances. The verb *to park* as applied to automobiles and the war word *tank* are cases in point. The use of a word in a restricted sense does not preclude its use also in other meanings. Often the restricted sense of a word belongs to a special or class vocabulary. An *enlargement* means to a photographer a large print made  
25 from a small negative, and in educational circles a *senior* is a member of the graduating class. Consequently, it sometimes happens that the same word will acquire different restricted meanings for different people. The word *gas* is an inclusive term for the chemist, but it calls up a more restricted idea in the kitchen. Narrowing of meaning may be confined to one locality under the influence of local conditions. *Nickel* in America means a coin, and for a number of  
30 years the word *prohibition* in this country generally suggested the prohibition of alcohol. In the same way the terms *democrat* and *republican* seldom have their broader significance to an American but rather imply adherence to one or the other of the two chief political parties in the United States.

### 7 Guided summary

Below is a short summary of the text. However, a number of important words and phrases have been removed. Can you complete the summary by filling in the gaps?

With time, there is a tendency for some words to 1) ..... their meaning and for 2) ..... to acquire a more restricted meaning. An 3) ..... of the former is the word 4) ....., which originally meant large in size but can now mean 5) ..... . The word *doctor* is a good example of the latter. Originally meaning 6) ..... man, nowadays it is usually 7) ..... to refer to a medical practitioner.

### 8 Language focus

- Read through the text again and underline any language used to introduce examples.
- What other words or phrases can be used to give examples?

### 9 Reading for detail

Now re-read the text and complete the table below.

#### Paragraph 1

##### Extension of meaning

Example 1:	Word <i>lovely</i>	New meaning <i>vague approval</i>
Example 2:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 3:	Word .....	New meaning .....

#### Paragraph 2

##### Narrowing of meaning

Example 1:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 2:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 3:	Word .....	New meaning .....

##### Narrowing of meaning (special vocabulary)

Example 1:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 2:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 3:	Word .....	New meaning .....

##### Narrowing of meaning (local vocabulary)

Example 1:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 2:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 3:	Word .....	New meaning .....
Example 4:	Word .....	New meaning .....

How are the examples of special and local vocabulary introduced?

## 10 Language for giving examples

### Examples as the main information in a sentence

For example,  
For instance, | the word *doctor* used to mean a learned man.

A good  
A classic  
A well-known  
A typical  
Another | example of this is the word *doctor*.

Examples of extension of meaning | are  
include | *lovely* and *great*.

The following are examples of extension of meaning: *lovely* and *great*.

The word *lovely* is a good | example  
illustration | of extension of meaning.

Extension of meaning can be illustrated by the words *lovely* and *great*.

The word *doctor* | illustrates this point.  
shows this point clearly.

The word *doctor* | is a case in point.  
is a good example of this.  
serves as a good illustration of this.

Words such as *lovely* and *great* serve as good examples.

This | is exemplified  
is shown | by the words *lovely* and *great*.  
is illustrated

### Examples as additional information in a sentence

Pavlov found that if some other stimulus, for example the ringing of a bell, preceded the food, the dog would start salivating.

A number of well-known diseases can result at least in part from stress, including arthritis, asthma, migraine, headaches and ulcers.

In Paris, Gassendi kept in close contact with many other prominent scholars such as Kepler, Galileo, Hobbes and Descartes.

The prices of resources, | such as  
like | copper, iron ore, oil, coal and aluminium, have  
declined in real terms over the past 20 years.

**11** Sentence constructions using *for example* and *such as*

- What kind of grammatical structures follow *for example* and *such as*?
- Is there any difference between them?

(i) Rewrite the sentences (a-f) below so that they include the examples which are given on the right. Use *such as* and make whatever changes you feel are necessary.

**Example:** *The desire to avoid stress may also lead people to avoid potentially beneficial changes to their lives, such as job changes and promotions.*

(ii) Rewrite the examples on the right as complete sentences using *for example*. Expand on the information which is given.

**Example:** *For example, they may avoid changing jobs or fail to pursue promotion opportunities.*

Sentences	Examples
<b>a</b> The desire to avoid stress may also lead people to avoid potentially beneficial changes to their lives.	<b>i</b> job changes, promotions
<b>b</b> Giving people the correct information can encourage them to adopt health promoting behaviour.	<b>ii</b> cutting down on smoking cutting down on drinking
<b>c</b> People are more likely to pay attention to certain bodily sensations when they are under stress.	<b>iii</b> aches, pains
<b>d</b> The focus of medical care in our society has been shifting towards changing many of our unhealthy behaviours rather than simply curing the resulting diseases.	<b>iv</b> poor eating habits, smoking, failure to exercise
<b>e</b> For some people, being called upon to give a talk in front of a class is a highly stressful stimulus that will immediately produce symptoms of an alarm reaction.	<b>v</b> a pounding heart and a dry mouth
<b>f</b> Young people begin smoking for a variety of reasons.	<b>vi</b> peer pressure and the role modelling of parents

**12** Writing Tasks

(i) Choose one or more of the points below and write a paragraph, adding examples to support the point(s).

- Clothing for traditional weddings varies from culture to culture.
- Differences in men's and women's speech may be partly based on social factors.
- What is described as preventative medicine may cover a number of different practices.
- Smoking has many disadvantages. Some of them concern personal hygiene and appearance whereas more serious disadvantages relate to health.

(ii) Write one or two paragraphs illustrating a fact, theory or argument within your own subject area.

