

Uneven 'U' Paragraph

Introduction

Paragraphs in academic writing need a clear structure - they are not just a collection of loosely connected sentences. Typical guidelines recommend a **topic sentence**, then **supporting sentences** then a **concluding sentence** (the latter optional for shorter paragraphs). However, this advice can be vague, particularly when it comes to what 'supporting' sentences actually involve.

More specific advice recommends a **TEEL** structure:

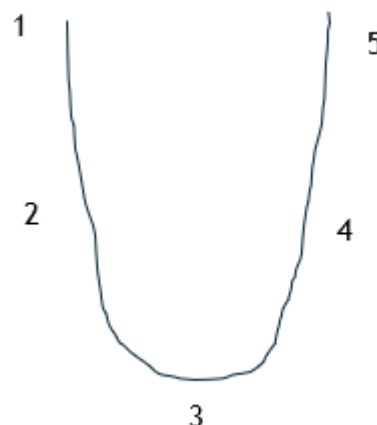
- Topic sentence
- Evidence sentence(s)
- Explanation sentence(s)
- Link sentence to a new idea or back to the topic sentence. But what precisely does one do for the 'evidence' and 'explanation' sentences?

The idealised U-paragraph

A more nuanced way to look at paragraphs with the concept of the **uneven U-paragraph**. The basic idea is to think of paragraphs as exhibiting a "U" shape: a) in an idealised sense, and then b) in a natural and more realistic sense.

The 'idealised' U-paragraph

- Level 1 — the raw, *unmediated data* of facts, information or concrete observation.
- Level 2 — *detailed interpretation* or description that provides framing for raw example
- Level 3 — summary of the main idea that introduces the reader to *two or more broad examples*
- Level 4 — more detailed sentence that *brings ideas together* and might *set up a problem* for the reader.
- Level 5 — abstract idea that *orients the reader towards a solution or conclusion*

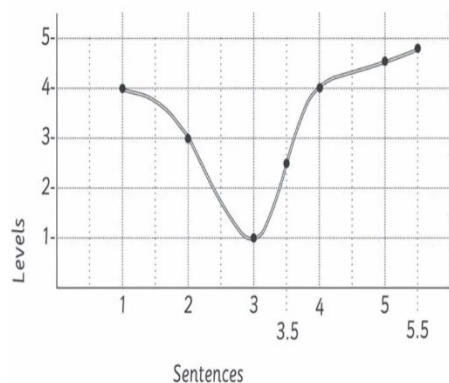


The realistic U-paragraph

Of course, nothing is ever perfect, and neither is the "U" shape. Sentences 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 might be longer or shorter than they need to be. Paragraphs don't need to have only five sentences either. They can have any number so you might have a few sentences, say, at level 2 or level 4 that do the same job. For example:

The situation is more like this (here there are two sentences at level 2 and three at level 4):

- 1.
- 2., 2.1.
- 3.
- 4., 4.1., 4.2.
- 5.



Hence, the idea of the *uneven-U* paragraph.

The aim of an uneven-U paragraph, regardless of its unevenness, is to arrive at a level 5 sentence that is more *general* in nature than the sentence you started with (a level 1 sentence).

(Hayot, 2014, p. 65)



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Example

Let's look at an example from a U.S study:

[1] We found that during K/DEX anesthesia, systemic HTS enhanced the cranial delivery of a spinal large-molecule tracer, whereas during ISO anesthesia, the tracer distribution was similar in the HTS and ITS groups. **[2]** Indeed, the poor intracranial availability of the tracer during K/DEX anesthesia could be augmented with HTS to match the effect of ISO anesthesia. **[3]** Interestingly, the total CNS retention of the tracer was similar between the HTS- and ITS-treated rats during K/DEX anesthesia, suggesting that HTS did not affect efflux from the CNS despite the change in distribution. **[4a]** Taken together, our findings suggest that a part of the CSF flowing into the fluid-deprived brain after an HTS bolus comes from the spinal canal. **[4b]** Furthermore, K/DEX is not an appropriate anaesthetic choice for administering spinal drugs targeting the brain unless boosted with HTS. **[5]** However, based on our current and previous findings,³³ anesthetic regimens containing α_2 -adrenergic agonists are particularly well-suited to enhance retention at the spinal administration level.

- **[1]** The first sentence is overlong but does the job of providing concrete information about what is known (different findings about anesthesia used and tracer outcomes);
- **[2]** The second provides more detailed information framing the example in [1] (how the poor availability of tracer can be augmented);
- **[3]** The third sentence sums up the evidence adduced in [1] and [2] and briefly interprets the findings with an example (how it did not affect efflux from the CNS);
- **[4]** The fourth level sentences [4a and 4b] are in two parts linked by the connector word 'furthermore'. These sentences are more detailed, setting up a problem that needs to be addressed (the CSF flow and the 'inappropriate anaesthetic choice');
- **[5]** The last sentence is more abstract, pointing towards a solution or conclusion (the use of a particular type of anaesthetic regime).

The 'U' shape is dominated by a long [1] level statement in this example.

Example

Let's look at another example:

[1] Multiple studies have investigated the correlation between the lack of simulation in Bachelor of Nursing programmes and MAEs [medication administration errors] committed by novice registered nurses (Chan and Burns 2021; Lim and Honey 2017; Myroniak and Elder 2021; Treiber and Jones 2018a). **[2]** Several novice registered nurses reported feeling unprepared for the stress and demands of managing multiple patients and administering numerous medications, highlighting the need for enhanced education and simulation to mitigate the risk of errors (Treiber and Jones 2018a). **[3]** Participants emphasised the necessity of focusing on the realities of nursing, suggesting that incorporating simulated distractions, multiple patients and phone calls could help reduce the incidence of errors (Treiber and Jones 2018a). **[4a]** Studies that utilised pre- and posttesting to evaluate the impact of simulation reported significant improvements following the implementation of simulation training (Chan and Burns 2021; Myroniak and Elder 2021). **[4b]** One study even reported a 73% reduction in MAEs after the introduction of Simulation programs (Chan and Burns 2021). **[6]** The education provided during simulated scenarios or during debriefing should include how MAEs occur, the consequences of these errors, and strategies to avoid these errors (Fernandez et al. 2023; Myroniak and Elder 2021; Treibe and Jones 2018b).

- **[1]** The first sentence sums up the concrete facts known (there is a correlation between lack of simulation and MAEs);
- **[2]** The second sentence gets more detailed about the concrete facts outlined in [1] (the level of unpreparedness among nurses);



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- **[3]** The third sentence sums up the key idea by giving an example (simulation can help reduce errors);
- **[4]** The fourth sentence is again in two parts. The first [4a] provides details (it discusses how studies about simulation leading to improvements) and then it gives another detailed example [4b];
- **[5]** The fifth sentence is more abstract and orients the reader towards a solution to the problem of MAEs (during simulation scenarios).

Example

Here's a final example:

[1] *The prominent role of the family environment, particularly the balance between cohesion and conflict, aligns with systemic and developmental models of adolescent psychopathology (Fosco and Lydon-Staley, 2020).* **[2]** *High family cohesion likely provides a crucial foundation of emotional security and support, which can motivate adolescents to engage more fully in treatment and help them practice new skills learned in therapy (Zisk et al., 2019).* **[3]** *Conversely, high family conflict acts as a persistent environmental stressor that can negate therapeutic gains and exacerbate symptoms of depression (van Houtum and Wever, 2024).* **[4]** *Our results suggest that the family context is an active ingredient influencing the success of multimodal treatments.* **[5]** *This finding supports the potential value of integrating family-based interventions for adolescents with high levels of familial conflict to enhance the efficacy of individual therapies (Waraan and Siqveland, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2022).*

- **[1]** The first sentence articulates some general facts known in relation to theoretical context (about 'the role of the family environment');
- **[2]** The second gets more detailed about this and provides further description (namely, the importance of 'high family cohesion' and 'emotional security and support', etc.);
- **[3]** The third sentence gets to the main point by giving an example ('family conflict' ... negates gains and can 'exacerbate symptoms of depression');
- **[4]** The fourth sentence brings the detailed ideas together ('family context' = success of 'multimodal treatments');
- **[5]** The fifth sentence generalises from [4] and outlines a solution in terms of the potential value deriving from the findings (integrating family-based interventions can enhance efficacy of treatments).

Summing up

The uneven-U paragraph is most suited to 'discussion'-type paragraphs are not introductory, method, results sections of a thesis or paper which have different structural requirements. Importantly it has a fractal nature, i.e., it can be used as a repeatable pattern in the sense it can be expanded beyond the confines of the paragraph. The originator of the idea writes: "I have been calling the Uneven U a "structure" or "arrangement" because it is more than simply just a way to build paragraphs. It is an essentially fractal or scalable model for any unit of argumentative or narrative prose larger than a paragraph: a sub-section, a section, an essay, or a book as a whole" (Hayot, 2014, p. 68).

References

Hayot, E. (2014). *The elements of academic style: Writing for the humanities*. Columbia University Press.



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