

Aula 7

THE PARAGRAPH

META

Write clear and well organized texts.

OBJETIVOS

At the end of this class, it is expected that the students:
Improve their knowledge about writing good paragraphs;
Understand the organization and structure of a paragraph;
Make correct use of types of paragraphs;

PRERREQUISITOS

Knowledge acquired from previous units and semesters.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to class 07! Units 01 to 06 dealt with elements related to sentence structure, right? Some of the topics we've studied and practiced were: verb/subject agreement, punctuation, and dependent and independent clauses. The next 03 classes will focus on the topic PARAGRAPH and we start by asking:

Do you think of the way you organize your ideas into paragraphs?

Do you know that there are different types of paragraphs?

How do you collect ideas to write your texts?

Do you know what a topic sentence is?

Talking about writing paragraphs is not new for you, right? In reality, the information you will find here is not different from what you've studied at school, in your Portuguese classes. The difference now is that you are writing in another language. By saying that, I hope you enjoy this new chance to review and practice such an important and interesting topic! Let's start from a reading activity that was adapted from *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing* (RAMAGE; BEAN; JOHNSON, 2006, p.118, 119, 127). It is an extract from the article by Dr. Andrés Martín.



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Before you read, think about...

Your opinion about tattoos and piercings;

Brazil's legislation about tattoos (is there any prohibition considering age?);

Tattoos and the relationship between parents and kids/teenagers/

Society prejudice and acceptance.

On Teenagers and Tattoos by Andrés Martín, M. D.

The Skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed: as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics.

-Melville/Moby Dick CII

Tattoos and piercings have become a part of our everyday landscape. They are ubiquitous, having entered the circles of glamour and the mainstream of fashion, and have even become an increasingly common feature of our urban youth. Legislation in most states restricts professional tattooing to adults older than 18 years of age, so “high end” tattooing is rare in children and adolescents, but such tattoos are occasionally seen in older teenagers. Piercings, by comparison, as well as self-made or “jailhouse” type tattoos, are not at all rare among adolescents or even among schoolage children. Like hairdo, makeup, or baggy jeans, tattoos and piercings can be subject to fad influence or peer pressure in an effort toward group affiliation. As with any other fashion statement, they can be construed as bodily aids in the inner struggle toward identity consolidation, serving as adjuncts to the defining and sculpting of the self by means of external manipulations. But unlike most other body decorations, tattoos and piercings are set apart by their irreversible and permanent nature, a quality at the core of their magnetic appeal to adolescents.

2 Adolescents and their parents are often at odds over the acquisition of bodily decorations. For the adolescent, piercings or tattoos may be seen as personal and beautifying statements, while parents may construe them as oppositional and enraging affronts to their authority. Distinguishing bodily adornment from self-mutilation may indeed prove challenging, particularly when a family is in disagreement over a teenager’s motivations and a clinician is summoned as the final arbiter. At such times it may be most important to realize jointly that the skin can all too readily become but another battleground for the tensions of the age, arguments having less to do with tattoos and piercings than with core issues such as separation from the family matrix. Exploring the motivations and significance underlying tattoos (Grumet, 1983) and piercings can go a long way toward resolving such differences and can become a novel and additional way of getting to know teenagers. An interested and nonjudgmental appreciation of teenagers’ surface presentations may become a way of making contact not only in their terms but on their turfs: quite literally on the territory of their skins.

(.....)



ACTIVITY

Now that you've read the first two paragraphs, I invite you to go back to paragraph one and mark the alternative that better describes it:

- a. () It discusses the first complex motivation that takes teenagers to tattoo their bodies: as part of an identity crisis.
- b. () It sums up the perspective of the article.
- c. () It presents the subject and sets up the argument that the popularity of piercings and tattoos can be partly explained due to the issue of identity.

COMMENTS ON THE ACTIVITIES

The writing process demands serious efforts from the reader, especially when we understand the reading process as an opportunity to interact with the text in a critical way. The reader ends up becoming a coauthor in this process when she/he understands that knowledge is being built as we agree or disagree with what is being said. As for the topic of this class, both skills require attention, preparation and knowledge related to Paragraph structure. If you've answered letter c, you've got the point! Yes, the writer introduces the topic and presents his first arguments. Besides attaching the popularity of tattoos and piercings to the issue of teen identity, he also points out their irreversible permanence.

DEFINITION OF PARAGRAPH

Take a look at this definition by the Cambridge Dictionaries Online (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/paragraphs>):

We organise what we write into sentences and paragraphs. A paragraph begins on a new line within the text and there is often a blank line between paragraphs. A paragraph usually contains more than one sentence and it is usually about one topic.

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paragraph>):

1. 1 a : a subdivision of a written composition that consists of one or more sentences, deals with one point or gives the words of one speaker, and begins on a new usually indented line b : a short composition or note that is complete in one paragraph

2. 2 : a character (as ¶) used to indicate the beginning of a paragraph and as a reference mark

Those explanations are about the format of a paragraph. Of course there is much more involved in writing a good paragraph. First of all, it is important to remember that a paragraph is a unit of text. Therefore, the ideas must be presented, developed and concluded. The paragraph can exist by itself or be a part of a text composed by different paragraphs.

It does not matter if you are writing a story (narrative), describing something or someone, expressing an opinion about something or someone, or presenting an explanation. The point is: your paragraph must have enough information to help the reader understand what you are talking about and get interested in it. How can you do it? By providing the reader with sentences that help understand/support the main idea presented in the paragraph.

Size – There is not a rule about the length of a paragraph (lines). It will depend on the writer's style and intentions; the discussion presented; or specific norms established, if any. However, in general, a good paragraph presents between 03 to 07 sentences. Note that we are not talking about the number of lines but number of sentences. Considering that a paragraph is a unit of text that must present: introduction, development, and conclusion, 03 sentences is a good number for us to think as the minimum that needs to be written about the topic of each paragraph. With that in mind, let's talk in a little more detail about the three parts of a paragraph.

Organization/Parts of a paragraph – A paragraph is usually composed of these three parts: introduction (beginning), discussion (middle), and conclusion (end). You should tell the reader what your text is about and it is done through what is called Topic Sentence: “A typical paragraph develops one idea, phrased in a topic sentence from which all the other sentences radiate” (WILSON & GLAZIER, 2003, p. 214). Each paragraph needs to present a topic sentence from which the other sentences must relate.

Considering the way ideas are organized in a paragraph, the topic sentence can be presented in any of the three parts of the paragraph. It can even come in the conclusion of the paragraph. Sometimes, however, the topic sentence is not even explicitly mentioned in the paragraph. The reader, then, must infer the main idea of the paragraph from the discussion that is being presented. Next class we will be focusing on the studies about Topic Sentences. Now let's go back to



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Proportion of the parts of a paragraph – The three parts of a paragraph need to be well connected: introduction (beginning), discussion (middle), and conclusion (end). As for their length, the introduction and the conclusion must be shorter than the development. It makes sense, right? The development (middle) is the part where we present the arguments that support the topic sentence. That is why it ends up being longer than the other parts.



Go back to the first paragraph of our introductory text on Teens and Tattoos and identify the topic sentence. Where is it presented?

- a. () In the introduction;
- b. () In the development;
- c. () In the conclusion.

COMMENTS ON THE ACTIVITIES

As you could observe, the first paragraph introduces, as a whole paragraph, the main topic of the text: teens and tattoos. To do so, the paragraph was started by the following statement: “Tattoos and piercings have become a part of our everyday landscape.” What comes next is the development of that idea. The last sentence closes the discussion of the paragraph. So, if you answered that the topic sentence is in the introduction of the paragraph you are correct! In this case, the first sentence is the topic sentence.

More about the parts of a paragraph:

Introduction (beginning) – You introduce the subject and the topic sentence is usually presented here. That’s what happened in the first paragraph of the text we’ve been analyzing here, as you can observe in the part that is in bold.

Development (middle) – It is the body of the text. In other words, it is the main part of the paragraph because it is where the author presents arguments, details, and explanations to support the main topic. In the case of the text about teens and tattoos, the author explains that part of the popularity of piercings and tattoos among teenagers is related to their identity.

Conclusion (end) – The author finishes the first paragraph using as a closing sentence the statement about the irreversible permanence of tattoos. A good closing sentence reminds the reader about the main topic of the discussion, which is the case here.

Tattoos and piercings have become a part of our everyday landscape. They are ubiquitous, having entered the circles of glamour and the mainstream of fashion, and have even become an increasingly common feature of our urban youth. Legislation in most states restricts professional tattooing to adults older than 18 years of age, so “high end” tattooing is rare in children and adolescents, but such tattoos are occasionally seen in older teenagers. Piercings, by comparison, as well as self-made or “jailhouse” type tattoos, are not at all rare among adolescents or even among schoolage children. Like hairdo, makeup, or baggy jeans, tattoos and piercings can be subject to fad influence or peer pressure in an effort toward group affiliation. As with any other fashion statement, they can be construed as bodily aids in the inner struggle toward identity consolidation, serving as adjuncts to the defining and sculpting of the self by means of external manipulations. **But unlike most other body decorations, tattoos and piercings are set apart by their irreversible and permanent nature, a quality at the core of their magnetic appeal to adolescents.**



SUMMARY

In this class, we’ve worked with the topic The Paragraph. By doing so, we’ve reviewed points from previous semester as for the relationship between verbs and subjects. We also presented some common situations that might cause doubts as for the use of singular or plural verbs. We’ve presented lists and examples of singular and plural indefinite pronouns, prepositional phrases and words that required more attention for they take both: singular and plural verbs.



SELF-EVALUATION

Did I increase my knowledge related to writing in English?

Can I make recognize what a good paragraph is?

Has my knowledge of the English language improved considering the studies and practices of previous semesters?



NEXT CLASS

Next class, the focus of your studies will be on The Topic Sentence. See you then!

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