

## Flow

The goal in essay writing is to move the reader smoothly from one sentence to the next, to carry the reader through your ideas without unnecessary interruptions. Sometimes this comes naturally. But mostly, flow in writing comes from hard work. Below are some principles to apply.

First, take a look at the following example from a student essay:

(1) The teacher of my math class was very knowledgeable, but I couldn't understand a word the teacher was saying. (2) I ended up having to drop the class. (3) The teacher's accent made it difficult to understand the words he spoke. (4) The students had difficulty paying attention to the teacher's lectures and taking notes because of that fact. (5) I couldn't reflect back on my notes to help me with my homework. (6) I spent most of my time focusing on understanding his speech instead of his lectures. (7) My parents were really angry that I dropped the class.

- **Focus.** Each paragraph should progress a single point. Make that point clear to the reader by having a strong topic sentence. Above, sentence 1 works as a topic sentence, but could it be any stronger? Delete any sentences that are off topic, such as sentence 7.
- **Point of view.** Try to keep shifts in point of view to a minimum. The above paragraph is about the teacher and the writer's reactions to the teacher. So there are two subjects here. Notice that in sentence 4 a new subject, the other students, suddenly interrupts the paragraph.
- **Logic.** Each sentence should progress an idea that relates to the overall point of the paragraph. The connections between those ideas should be easy to follow. For instance, sentence 2 is the effect of everything else in the paragraph. So it would make more sense if this sentence were to appear last.
- **Transitions.** One way to make the connections between sentences clear to the reader is to use transitions. Transitions can be done various ways, but the most common way is to use transitional expressions. Some examples: first, next, afterwards, besides, for example, also, likewise, because of this, even though, on the contrary, in other words, therefore, consequently, since.
- **Pronouns.** Pronouns link sentences together, since the antecedent of a pronoun is often a noun in a previous sentence. For instance, you could change the second "the teacher" in sentence 1 to "he" and "the teacher's" in sentence 3 to "his."
- **Sentence variety.** If you use the same sentence structure sentence after sentence, your writing will be very stilted. See sentences 5 and 6 above. Try to vary your sentences. Two ways to do this are by combining sentences and using subordinate clauses.
- **Sentence combining.** Sometimes two sentences say almost the same thing and could be combined. See sentences 4 and 6 above. Or sometimes to vary sentence structure you may want to put two sentences together with a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but).
- **Subordinate clauses.** You can also combine sentences and show the relation between two ideas with the use of subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause starts with a subordinate conjunction, which names the relation of the subordinate clause to the main clause (such as the "which" in this sentence). Here is a partial list of subordinating conjunctions: after, although, as, because, before, even though, if, since, so that, than, that, unless, until, when, where, which, while.
- **Parallel structure.** When you have two items, or a series, it is clearer to put all the items into the same grammatical structure. For instance, you could change sentence 6 to "I spent most of my time focusing on *understanding his speech instead of comprehending his lectures.*" Or "I spent most of my time focusing on *his speech instead of his lectures.*"

(1) The teacher of my math class was very knowledgeable, but I couldn't understand a word the teacher was saying. (2) I ended up having to drop the class. (3) The teacher's accent made it difficult to understand the words he spoke. (4) The students had difficulty paying attention to the teacher's lectures and taking notes because of that fact. (5) I couldn't reflect back on my notes to help me with my homework. (6) I spent most of my time focusing on understanding his speech instead of his lectures. (7) My parents were really angry that I dropped the class.

*Possible revisions:*

My math teacher was very knowledgeable, but his strong accent kept me from doing well in the class. I spent most of my time trying to decipher what he was saying and was unable to keep notes due to my confusion. Since I didn't have notes, I had trouble doing my homework. I realized that since I was unable to do the homework, I would never pass the tests. In the end, I decided to drop the class.

Last quarter, I was forced to drop my math class. The reason was the teacher and his way of speaking. Due to his accent, I could not understand lectures or take notes. So I was lost when I tried to do the homework. Nothing improved for two weeks. That's when I decided to try again the next quarter with a different teacher.