

---

**Clearer sentences &  
paragraphs:**

**Make your writing  
flow better**

Cassily Charles for Digital Health CRC  
September 2020





# Outline

- Introductions
- What does 'clear' mean?
- How do we achieve it in writing?
- Tool-box of language techniques
- Different levels of your text that you can adjust
- Applying it to your own writing

## Introductions

Cassily Charles

Please introduce yourself in 'chat'

- Your research / professional focus
- Geographical location
- A 'human' fact, e.g. Have you eaten a pear today? What kinds of birds are usually outside your window? Do you play the ocarina?



## What does 'clear' mean?

- Culture of English-language academic writing
- Writer works hard, so that the reader finds it easy
- Value & effects of clear academic writing



# How do we achieve clarity in writing?

1. Writing product, versus writing process
2. Different writers have different processes
  - Planners – planning for clarity
  - Drafters – editing for clarity
3. Prescription versus tool-box



# Tool-box for clarity



Levels of the text which you can adjust for clarity...

- \* Context (e.g. readership)
- \* **Global structure**
- \* **Paragraph structure**
- \* **Links between sentences**
- \* Word choices
- \* Formatting & layout

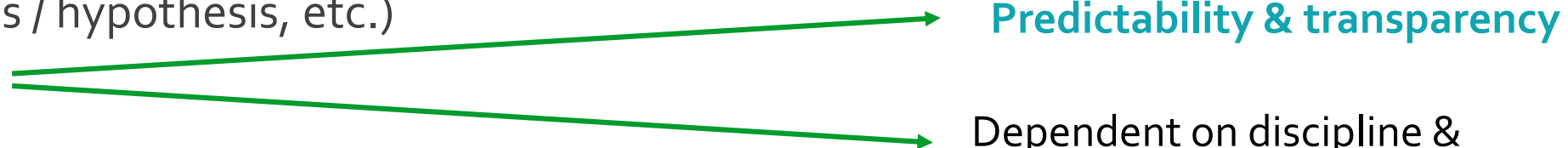
## Global structure of your text

- Major parts/chapters/sections
- **Predictability & transparency**
- Differences between disciplines
- Key parts of the structure for clarity
  - Table of contents
  - Introduction & mini-introductions
  - Section headings & sub-headings



# Global structure of your text

## The Introduction

- From general to specific
  - 3 main stages
    1. Background or context
    2. Topic (purpose / aims / topic / research questions / hypothesis, etc.)
    3. **Outline**
- Predictability & transparency
- Dependent on discipline & type of introduction
- 



Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the developing world. Schooling opportunities, even for those who are comparatively well-off, are limited by centuries of traditional attitudes and the predominantly rural nature of the population base. These opportunities have become even more limited, particularly for women, by the impact of continuous war and the destruction of much of the existing educational infrastructure. This essay examines the role of gender and birth order in underpinning discrimination in schooling opportunities and will limit itself to data from two sites, one in metropolitan and one in rural Afghanistan. It will be shown that gender and birth order are the two most significant factors impacting on schooling opportunities for Afghani girls and women. The essay will first examine the educational landscape of current Afghanistan, and then move on to consider in turn the specific factors impacting on access to schooling.

Find the boundaries of the 3 stages

- Context / background
- Topic
- Outline

Based on the outline in this introduction, can you **predict the structure** (paragraph topics) of the rest of the essay which would follow this?

# Paragraphs

- Predictability & transparency
- 3-part structure
  1. Topic sentence
  2. Body
  3. Concluding sentence (optional)



## Example: Introduction to a coursework essay (Text A in Hand-out)

It can be argued that a Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons. The first is that none of the leaders of the government, which has been based on a Western democratic constitutional system, has attempted to rule the country in a democratic way. Instead they have instituted autocratic rule. The second reason has been the lack of strong political parties. As a result, when constitutional crises have arisen there has not been sufficient popular support behind any one party to overcome the situation. While it is necessary to recognize that these are not the only factors determining the failure of a democratic system, they stand as the most prominent reasons.

## Example: Introduction to a coursework essay (Text A in Hand-out)

It can be argued that a Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons.

The first is that none of the leaders of the government, which has been based on a Western democratic constitutional system, has attempted to rule the country in a democratic way. Instead they have instituted autocratic rule. The second reason has been the lack of strong political parties. As a result, when constitutional crises have arisen there has not been sufficient popular support behind any one party to overcome the situation.

While it is necessary to recognize that these are not the only factors determining the failure of a democratic system, they stand as the most prominent reasons.

# Paragraphs

Topic sentences can have either just one part or two:

1. Topic
2. Outline (a list, a plural or an abstract/general term)

It can be argued that a Western political system has failed in Pakistan for two major reasons.

**Topic**



**Outline**

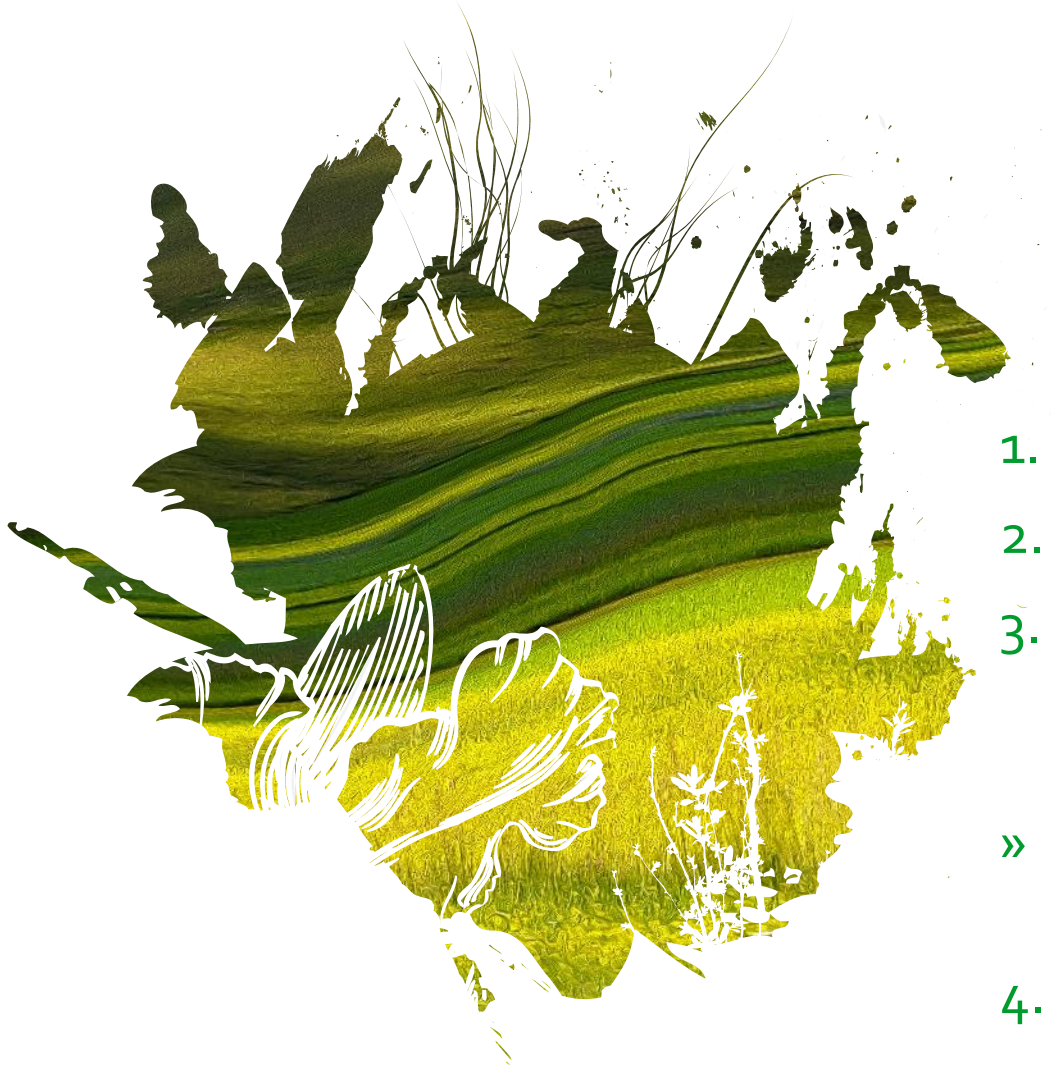


# Paragraphs

- **Predictability & transparency**
- Differences due to discipline, type of text and type of chapter / section ...
  1. Which paragraphs need topic sentences?
  2. Which topic sentences need outlines?



# Paragraphs



## Exercise

1. Read Text C
2. What is the main idea of this paragraph?
3. Write a topic sentence which captures the **topic**, and also provides an **outline**, to help the reader predict the structure.
  - » *Reminder: Try a list or a plural for the outline. Put it at the end of the topic sentence.*
4. Type your topic sentence into the chat window.

## Paragraphs

The main complaint about the sociological perspective is that it concentrates on social structures and norms and, as a consequence, ignores the individual's dispositions and characteristics (Hurrelman, 1989; Poole, 1989). Sociological research has also been censured for treating the individual as a passive recipient, influenced solely by environmental forces. This criticism is especially relevant to the 'social address' studies (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1983).

Hemmings B. (1994). Senior secondary school persistence and attrition: The development and testing of a theoretical model. PhD thesis, UNSW.



# Paragraphs

## Applying it to your own writing

### » Planning or editing?

- Take a paragraph of your own (not an intro, conclusion or abstract)
- What is the main idea of this paragraph?
- Is there a topic sentence? Does the paragraph need one? How long is it?
- Are you using other signposting? e.g. sub-headings
- Does the para need an outline? Does it have parts / points?
- Draft a topic sentence for your paragraph

## Links between sentences

- **Predictability & transparency**
- Chain of information
- 2 parts to the chain link in the sentence:
  - \* Theme
  - \* Rheme



## Links between sentences

Theme (starting point) and Rheme (forward direction)

*Sociological research concentrates on social structures and norms.*

*Sociological research concentrates on social structures and norms.*

*Sociological research*

**Theme**

*concentrates on social structures and norms.*

**Rheme**

## Links between sentences

Theme (starting point) and Rheme (forward direction)

- *Sociological research on secondary school attrition concentrates on social structures and norms.*
- *The main complaint about the sociological perspective on secondary school attrition is that it concentrates on social structures and norms.*
- *Social structures and norms are the focus of sociological research on secondary school attrition.*

## Links between sentences

### Version 1

#### Addicted to the Internet

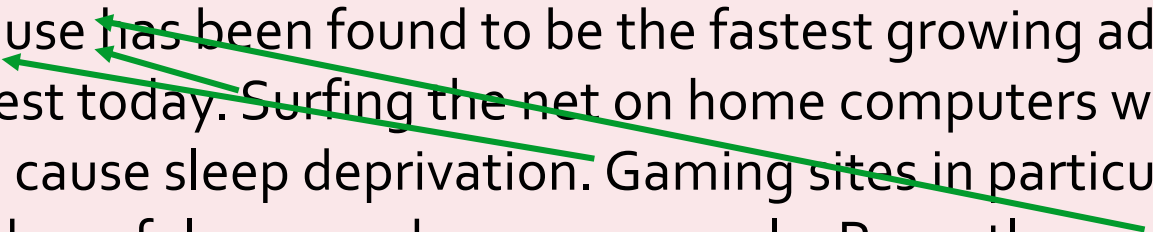
Internet use has been found to be the fastest growing addictive behaviour in the West today. Sleep deprivation can be caused by surfing the net for hours on home computers. Young people are often found to overuse gaming sites in particular. Facebook and other social networking sites have recently been identified as an even bigger problem.

## Links between sentences

### Version 2

#### Addicted to the Internet

Internet use has been found to be the fastest growing addictive behaviour in the West today. Surfing the net on home computers was previously found to cause sleep deprivation. Gaming sites in particular seemed to provoke harmful overuse by young people. Recently, social networking sites like Facebook have been identified as an even bigger problem.

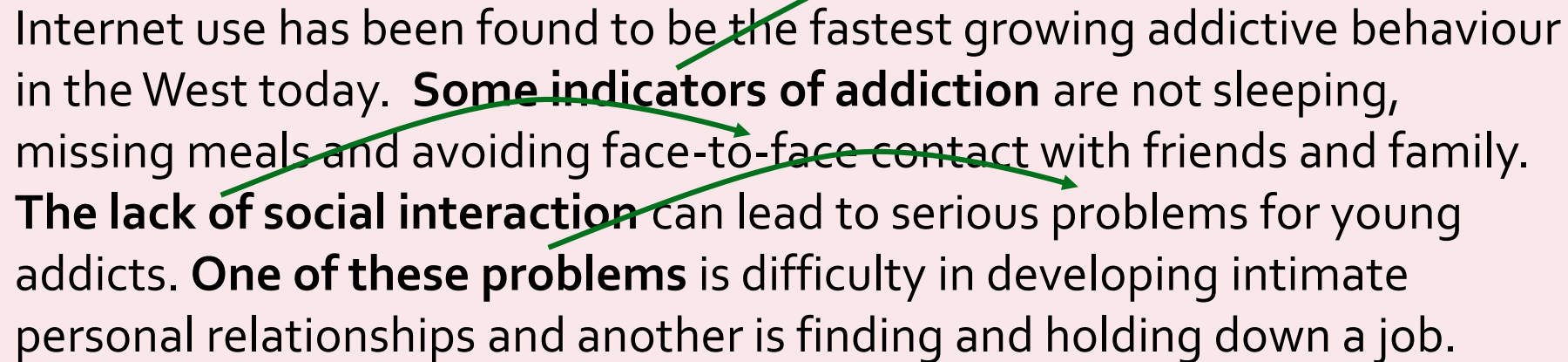


## Links between sentences

### Version 3

Addicted to the Internet

Internet use has been found to be the fastest growing addictive behaviour in the West today. **Some indicators of addiction** are not sleeping, missing meals and avoiding face-to-face contact with friends and family. **The lack of social interaction** can lead to serious problems for young addicts. **One of these problems** is difficulty in developing intimate personal relationships and another is finding and holding down a job.

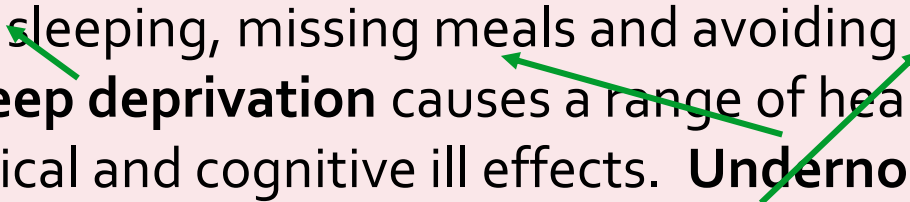


## Links between sentences

### Version 4

#### Addicted to the Internet

There are three main indicators of addictive behaviour amongst internet users: not sleeping, missing meals and avoiding contact with friends and family. **Sleep deprivation** causes a range of health problems, leading to both physical and cognitive ill effects. **Undernourishment** similarly leads to health problems. **The lack of social contact** may be the most serious as it can lead to an inability to form personal relationships and in finding and holding a job.





## Links between sentences

### Checklist for clear sentence links

1. New information is at the end. 'Old' info at the front.
2. Long-distance links to show the structure of ideas
3. Short-distance links as 'sticky tape'
4. Themes which connect back to the topic sentence

## Links between sentences

### Exercise

Look at Text B

1. Underline the Themes (beginning of each sentence)
2. Does each Theme link back to old/known/shown info? Are the links short or long?

*Bonus task: Text D*

Can you find any sentences which have 'new' information at the beginning?  
If so, what is connecting that sentence to the rest of the paragraph?

## Links between sentences

### Exercise

Compare the two versions of Text E.

Which version is pre-editing and which version is post-editing?

Can you see why the changes have been made?



## Links between sentences

### Applying it to your own writing

1. Choose one or two paragraphs of your own writing
2. Is it clear in your mind what the main idea is for the paragraph?
3. Does it have a topic sentence? Need one?
4. Underline the Themes/beginning of sentences.
5. Does each Theme contain known/shown/old information? Any new info at the front?
6. Are the links long-distance or short-distance?



---

## Your next steps...

- What do you plan to do next for the clarity of your own writing?
- Any other questions or comments?

