OF ALL THE ASPECTS OF GOOD WRITING, the paragraph is most difficult for many students, but it is also among the most important skills to master. The word derives from Greek roots meaning “to inscribe around.” Think of the paragraph as the middle level of organization—a grouping of sentences less comprehensive than an entire theme, essay, or story. Whether the type of writing is descriptive, narrative, or otherwise, each paragraph will have a focus point, emphasis, or central idea. In writing dialogue, the paragraph indentation will indicate a change of speaker. In narration, the paragraph will change with each shift in scene or direction. In exposition, each paragraph must have a central, organizing topic corresponding to the capital Roman numerals on the outline. Never use a paragraph indentation arbitrarily. Newspaper and magazine articles may provide misleading examples of paragraphing.

Good paragraphs of any type will follow the general guidelines that apply to all formal writing: they should be substantial, sequential, and cumulative. To be substantial, all material in the paragraph must relate to the central point, purpose, or focus. To be sequential, the material in the paragraph must follow a clearly logical or intuitive order. To be cumulative, the paragraph must lead up to a point, summary, or impression that was not evident from the topic sentence alone.

**Expository Paragraphs**

The form of expository paragraphs consists of two essential parts: the topic sentence followed by examples and evidence. Other kinds of statements, such as transitions and summaries, may be required, depending on the material being communicated. Most readers will look for the topic sentence at or near the beginning of the paragraph. The bulk of the paragraph will consist of supporting statements that prove and illustrate the paragraph topic. Often, the supporting statements will contain specific evidence consisting of facts, figures, direct quotations, and logical inferences based on the information.

Quotations and other types of hard evidence, such as facts, dates, and figures, require introduction and, in some cases, followup explanation. Do not begin a new point in the paragraph with the hard evidence alone, as the reader will have difficulty understanding its place in your design. At the very least, supply a transitional phrase before citing the evidence. Generally, an expository paragraph will be built on more than one piece of evidence.

Long quotations at the end or beginning of paragraphs tend to float, as the blocked spacing confuses the reader as to where the quotation belongs. The exception is a teaser quotation used epigrammatically to begin the entire theme. Long quotations always require adequate mooring within the paragraph form.

Avoid sentence-long transitions at the end of the paragraph, as they blur the focus of the paragraph and make the next topic sentence repetitive. Short transitions between paragraphs can be included in the topic sentences, if necessary.

Proportion is an important consideration in paragraph writing. A good minimum length is three sentences. A good maximum is one and one-half pages in the final format. Paragraphs of two
In Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished*, women evince varying degrees of compliance with the social expectations and restrictions of the times. Aunt Louisa Hawk is among those ladies who are not only comfortable in their role but also determined to make sure other women comply as well. She understands that as a woman in her time she is merely expected to tend to the “home business” and sustain the status quo. When Granny, Bayard, Ringo, and Drusilla want to go after the mules and silver that the Union Army has taken from Sartoris, Aunt Louisa says, “Rosa, you shan’t go. I forbid it. Brother John will thank me to do so” (105). At first, Rosa Millard resembles Aunt Louisa in her conformity to the expectations society has for her. As the mother-in-law of Colonel Sartoris, she is expected to run the farm and take care of business while he is away on the battlefield. When the Colonel returns home for a visit, Granny greets him as if nothing extraordinary has happened: “Come in. Louvinia is putting your dinner on the table. You will just have time to wash” (12). She thus assures him of her control over the situation at home. Later, however, Granny finds that the conditions of war make this degree of compliance difficult. To regain her lost property, she embarks on a journey that will lead her into chicanery and theft. Forging requisition orders with Ringo’s help, Granny is caught in a moral quandary that is seen when both Ringo and Bayard try to dissuade her from using her tactics on Grumby: “. . . Granny, sitting there without moving at all and saying, ‘But the horses do not belong to them because they are stolen property,’ and we said, ‘Then no more will they belong to us,’ and Granny said, ‘But they do not belong to them’” (173). While Granny asks forgiveness for her deception in the name of helping others, Drusilla Hawk adapts to wartime conditions by openly rejecting the female role. To follow Colonel Sartoris, to “hurt Yankees” and avenge her fiance’s death, she cuts her hair short and wears a man’s uniform. She is not one to stay at home and tend the house. However, her mother, flanked by the women of Jefferson, is able to force Drusilla to resume at least the external signs of the submissive woman. Obligated by propriety to marry the colonel, “she was beaten, like as soon as she let them put the dress on her she was whipped” (231). Now forced to live as a respectable woman of the times, Drusilla remains bitterly frustrated in a role that confines and distorts her actions as much as the corset defines her body. All three women demonstrate the power of social conventions to control behavior, even in those women who attempt to rebel.