Second Pass: Paragraph Structure and Clarity

After your first pass, you know the paper contains what it needs to do the job. In the second pass, check that the main points and supporting ideas are appropriately organized in paragraphs.

Let’s take a close look at individual paragraphs in the body of your writing. For each paragraph, ask the following questions:

**Unity of Focus**
• Is there one, and only one, main point of the paragraph?
• Is all the information in the paragraph related enough to be in the same paragraph?
• Can you identify the central idea of each paragraph?

**Topic Sentence**
• Does the paragraph have a topic sentence—one sentence that captures the central idea of the paragraph?
• Is the topic sentence the first sentence of the paragraph? (Or, if you’re starting with a transitional sentence, the second sentence?)

**Supporting Ideas**
• Do sentences expand, clarify, illustrate and explain points mentioned or suggested in each main idea? Your goal is to smoothly lead the reader, step-by-step, to each main idea.
• Are there enough details in the paragraph to support the central idea?
• Are there any “extra sentences” that seem to be irrelevant to the main point?
• Do all transitional words, phrases, and clauses improve the flow and show proper relationships?
• Do most paragraphs contain three to seven sentences?

If you did a lot of rearranging of paragraphs in this step, try the organizational editing check on the previous page—just to make sure you’re on track.

(This excerpt is from the Tongue and Quill 2015 edition, pages 94-95)