

## Paragraph Structure

### Example 1

Simons' compositional range was clearly demonstrated throughout the rest of the evening's program, on which he performed only one other piece, *A Deep and Dazzling Darkness*. Written by his teacher and mentor Scottish composer James MacMillan, that piece, which Simons amiably described as "grotesque, bizarre, and gloomy," in truth, suggests a kind of musical anxiety attack or the soundtrack to a particularly confused and disturbing nightmare. With recorded male screams to emphasize the dire darkness, the piece turned out to be a perfect platform for Simons' playing, characterized by his precision, invention, and remarkably intense sense of focus and concentration.

Once the audience had recovered, Simons took a seat in the auditorium as Alsop took the musicians through performances of Simons' exuberant orchestration....

**A paragraph should have only one point.** This example starts with one point—the large range of Simons' compositions. But most of the paragraph is devoted to a second point about someone else's music. It's a common problem: The writer plans to talk about Point A, but first has to provide some background, so he states A, then detours onto Points B and C, and doesn't return to A until a paragraph or two later. The editor has to sort this out: Provide the background and then make Point A, for example.

### Example 2

For violinmaker David John Morse, the Holy Grail is waiting somewhere among the maple trees growing in the mountains of Eastern Europe, between the Balkans and the Czech Republic. Even though it is hidden from view, he'll know it when he sees it. He saw it once before, not in an Indiana Jones vision, but on the back of the 1740 Guarneri del Gesu violin now named for its legendary owner a century ago, the Belgian virtuoso Eugene Ysaÿe.

That one-piece back is "one of the most perfect pieces of wood ever to be made into a violin," says Morse...

**Structure a paragraph to leave the reader with the take-away message.** The last thought of this paragraph is about the Belgian virtuoso Ysaÿe. But the writer actually wanted to leave the reader with this image: "the back of the 1740 Guarneri del Gesu violin." Transitions depend upon the last thought of a paragraph hooking to the first thought of the next one. In this case, the transition—the back of the Guarneri del Gesu...is a near-perfect piece of wood—is weakened. The reader has to mentally leap-frog the Ysaÿe reference to make the connection.

### Example 3

[original]

Guitarists typically begin delving into lead guitar by learning scale fingerings that stay in one position and span all six strings. If you've tried this, but found the approach frustrating because you couldn't figure out how to draw melodies from these patterns, you're not alone. These scale positions eventually become familiar territory once you've spent enough time exploring them, but at first they can be daunting. This often discourages competent rhythm guitarists from investigating the lead realm more thoroughly.

An alternate tactic may prove more user-friendly...

[edited]

Guitarists typically delve into lead guitar by learning scale fingerings that stay in one position and span all six strings. Then they figure out how to draw melodies from these patterns. To do that, a player has to explore the scale positions a long time before they become familiar. If you've tried this technique and become frustrated, you're not alone; it's an approach that often discourages competent rhythm guitarists from investigating the lead realm more thoroughly.

An alternative tactic may prove more user-friendly...

**Build each sentence on the previous one.** In this paragraph, the second, third, and fourth sentences feel as if they're saying the same thing—the sentences don't progress. To edit, limit each sentence to one idea. Then look for the train of thought and reorder the sentences so they follow the logic. Group like thoughts together. Put the transitional idea at the end of the graf.