
UNIT 6 WRITING EFFECTIVELY

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

Journalism is the craft of conveying news, information, descriptive material, opinions, comments and trends to the general public through various vehicles of mass media like newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the Internet and most recently, even cell phones. Writers, reporters, columnists, editors and photographers act as the chief purveyors of information and opinion in contemporary mass society. Lippman interpreted the journalist's role as a mediator or translator, in a way, a middleman between the public and the policymakers. He believed that the common person was not able to deconstruct all the information available or understand issues because they were complex. The journalist was thus the intermediary who listened, recorded, distilled and then passed on the filtered information for public consumption. So in a way, 'news is what the consensus of journalists determines it to be.' This implied that the public was receiving only the information that the journalists handed down to them.

On the other hand, Dewey believed that the public was intelligent and discerning and capable of understanding the issues, political or otherwise, and that decisions should be made in a public forum after discussion and debate. He gave importance to the public and felt that journalists should do more than simply passing information. They should engage citizens with the experts and the elites, and they should propose and generate content through conversation, dialogue and debate. The shared knowledge of many is superior to a single individual's knowledge. Modern journalists view their role as collaborative and keep the readers focused while writing their stories.

Journalists need to assess the needs of their audience and deliver what they want, on the one hand, and meet the requirements of the organisation in which they work, adhering to the principles they subscribe to, on the other. This means that journalists have to suspend their personal opinions to deliver what the readers want, ensuring the popularity of the newspaper. They need to bear in mind the interests and the level of understanding of their readers and relate the news to their personal experiences and contemporary events and issues. They need to remain faithful to the facts and present them with simplicity and clarity while making the story sound exciting and interesting to read at the same time.

In the previous unit, we have discussed the basics of writing. In this unit, we shall explain the qualities of good writing, the structure and function of a paragraph, and different writing styles.

6.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the qualities of good writing;
- write effective paragraphs; and
- use appropriate style for writing.

6.2 QUALITIES OF GOOD WRITING

A writer projects the sincere and indefinable qualities of personality into his or her writing. Any kind of sincere writing has the writer's 'voice', which is his/her opinion. But it ought to be a voice that has been modulated to the needs of the audience. The appropriate voice should be direct, clear and unstrained.

It is best to avoid rhetoric and high flown words, which might give a false ring, making the writing appear insincere. It is also essential to write with consistency; the hallmarks of good writing are economy of words, simplicity, clarity and rhetorical stance.

6.2.1 Economy of Words

It is worthwhile to look at the quotation from William Strunk & E. B. White's 'The Elements of Style: "A sentence should contain no unnecessary

words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer makes all sentences short or that he avoids all details but that every word tells.”

In short, economical writing is ‘efficient and aesthetically satisfying’ because it makes the minimum demand on the reader and promotes pleasure at the same time. This is achieved “by producing a sense of form and right proportion, a sense of words that fit the ideas that they embody.”

6.2.2 Simplicity

Simplicity does not mean that complex sentences should be avoided. Simplicity means that there should be no attempt to embellish the writing with rhetoric, as said earlier. **Cervantes** has said, “All affectation is bad.” Hence a natural, unpretentious style is the best. However, this is easier said than done since the ability to say profound things simply comes with years of writing and polishing.

6.2.3 Clarity

Clarity is a basic requirement for all writing. Even complex ideas can be presented lucidly. Let us consider the basic purpose of writing- to clarify and inform. If that is the aim, then a writer should not create hurdles in the shape of convoluted sentences, jargon and rhetoric, making understanding difficult. This can happen if the writer has clarity of thought, understands his/her idea, and wishes to convey it to others.

In brief, the writing should be clear, orderly, readable and in a language understandable to the audience. Hence, it is important to consider the audience to decide how much knowledge and language the writer can ‘assume’. Expository writing should be readable, informative and engaging. It could even be poetic!

6.2.4 Rhetorical Stance

Any kind of writing should be human. This means that it should not only address the mind but also appeal to the senses and the heart. It should not be cut and dried or too dispassionate. Here the writer’s knowledge of his /her audience would help him or her decide the rhetorical stance. The readers can be hypothetical or real; the writer would be addressing them, assuming an appropriate voice and a suitable and appropriate relationship to his/her material.

These are a few basic things that will help to decide the rhetorical stance.

- Who is the writer?
- Who his/her readers are?
- Why is he/she addressing them, and on what occasion?
- What is his/her relationship to the subject matter?
- How does he/she want the readers to relate to the subject matter?

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. Explain the qualities of good writing.

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2. What are the two basic factors that determine the style of a written piece?

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3. What determines the understanding or perception of a written piece?

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6.3 THE PARAGRAPH

As discussed in the previous unit, a paragraph is one of the central components of all kinds of writing. Effective writing will depend upon the way the topic has been divided into paragraphs and how well they cohere with each other. This section of the unit will consider various aspects of the paragraph. “A paragraph is a collection of sentences that helps you fulfil your thesis (theme promise). Itself a small “theme”, a paragraph should be written and specific: and it should not wander or make irrelevant remarks.” (McCuen and Winkler, 1980). Another definition of a paragraph is that it is “a group of sentences or a single sentence that forms a unit” (Lunsford and Connors). It is not the number of sentences that constitute a paragraph but the unity and coherence of ideas among these sentences.

A paragraph may summarise the topic as in the introduction or the conclusion or elucidation of the main point. In other words, a paragraph can introduce a thesis statement, explain specific details, persuade or argue present points for or against an issue. In journalistic writing, one may have one-sentence paragraphs, too, but they are not so common. A strong paragraph has one controlling idea and other sentences unified around it. A paragraph is a

microcosm of the article and has the main idea and explains or describes details. Just as there is a transition of ideas from one paragraph to another, there is a transition from one sentence to another within a paragraph.

6.3.1 Functions of a Paragraph

According to Richard M. Weaver (1910-1963), a paragraph is like a visual aid that signals the beginning of new thought. ‘The paragraph has the useful role of **organising our thoughts** into groups of intermediate size.’

In earlier times, the turn in the thought was marked by a symbol in the margin. Today we indicate this by segregating paragraphs and by using indentation. The meaning of the word paragraph is “something written besides”, referring to the symbol written in the margin in medieval times. It signals to the readers that a new set of thoughts is beginning. The readers, then, turn their attention to something new. Paragraphs are indicators of transition of thought and are miniature compositions in themselves having a unity of their own. They have a major point and facilitate progression while reading. A good paragraph has unity, coherence and emphasis.

There are pieces of writing which are single-paragraph compositions too. These are self-contained and carry a logical progression of thought, and sentence discourse markers mark the transition of thought. As a component of a larger composition, a paragraph is not a device to mark mechanical intervals in writing to change the reader.

6.3.2 Characteristics of a Good Paragraph

First and foremost, a paragraph has unity, coherence and completeness.

Unity: Unity is developed when one general idea governs the entire paragraph. This general idea is a topic sentence, usually found at the beginning of a paragraph. It may occur in the middle or at the end of the paragraph as well. When it occurs in the beginning, it signposts the new thought in the paragraph and allows the reader to be mentally prepared for it. It is considered effective when it occurs at the end of the paragraph. It appears as the logical conclusion of all that was said in the paragraph, or one can say sums up the content of the paragraph. A topic sentence may be implied rather than stated. All details in the paragraph support the topic sentence.

Consider this paragraph for its unity. It has a topic sentence. Every detail that follows supports this sentence. Nothing is irrelevant, and the last sentence seems to sum up the paragraph's points and reiterates the topic sentence.

Coherence: Coherence means that one sentence follows another in a clear, logical sequence in a paragraph. Coherence allows the reader to move from one idea to the next, see the connections between ideas and the topic sentence.

The devices used to obtain coherence are parallel grammatical structures and signals like ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’, ‘next’, ‘further’ etc. These are discourse markers, and they indicate not only the turn in the thought but also the

hierarchy of the ideas. Normally, one would find the idea least important occurring towards the end of the paragraph.

Completeness: A paragraph is complete when enough is said to support a topic sentence to make it convincing. This can be obtained by providing details, supporting ideas, illustrations and examples or using direct quotations.

6.3.3 The Structure of a Paragraph

A paragraph comprises a controlling idea or topic sentence and information that explains, describes, argues in favour, expands or illustrates it. On the larger scale, the paragraph does the same function concerning the controlling idea of the larger composition.

The components of a paragraph are the controlling idea or topic sentence, explanation of the controlling idea, examples used in the explanation, explanation of the example, completion of the paragraph's idea and transition into the next paragraph.

Controlling Idea or Topic Sentence

It is the expression of the main idea, topic or the focus of the paragraph in a long sentence or a collection of sentences. The controlling idea directs the development of the paragraph. As mentioned above, it may occur in the beginning, middle or the end of the paragraph. It may appear in the beginning and the end of the paragraph, as well. It helps the reader to identify the point and notice how the ideas are organised in the composition.

Explanation of the controlling idea

The subsequent sentences in the paragraph explain the writer's thoughts on the main topic or idea. They present the rationale for how the reader should interpret the information presented. The explanation may cite examples to substantiate the claims made in the controlling idea.

Example and its explanation

An example represents the relationship established in the idea and the explanation portions of the paragraph. It provides support or evidence of the idea and the explanation that has just been offered. Sometimes, the example needs to be explained, especially to clarify why one chose to use particular examples to substantiate the major claim or focus in the paragraph. This establishes the relevance of the example to the topic sentence by explaining the relationship of the example with the topic sentence.

Transition

Occurring at the end of the paragraph, the transition reviews the relevance of the information discussed in the paragraph and sums it up in brief to mark the completion of the idea of the paragraph. This prepares the reader for the next paragraph. Loose ends are tied up, and the reader is reminded of the relevance of the idea to the controlling idea of the composition. The transitional sentence establishes the relationship between ideas and creates a

logical progression. Transitions can be marked by a single word, a phrase or a sentence in a paragraph and by a whole paragraph in a longer composition.

To sum up, it can be said that paragraph writing is an organic process that makes intricate links between various ideas which are connected to form one larger idea that runs through the entire paragraph or the composition.

Purpose statements

Like a thesis statement, papers have purpose statements that announce the paper's purpose, scope, and direction. It tells the reader what to expect in a paper and what the specific focus will be. Some examples of statements of purpose are given below.

“This paper examines. . .,”

“The aim of this paper is to. . .,” “The purpose of this essay is to . . .”

A purpose statement usually appears toward the end of the introduction. The purpose statement may be expressed in several sentences or even an entire paragraph.

6.3.4 The Process of Writing a Paragraph

Paragraphs can be descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive, based on cause and effect, a definition, comparison and contrast between two things, classification or a sequence. So first, decide on what kind of paragraph you wish to write.

Decide the topic and purpose of writing.

This would depend upon your topic. Think of the topic on which you wish to write. You must be convinced about what you are going to write. This will ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of your paragraph. Writing a paragraph is like writing a good essay. A paragraph that attracts a reader to read through to the end has an introduction, supporting evidence and a conclusion. For this, it is important to take into account the potential reader and his/her interests. It has a logical transition of thought, its sentences cohere, and an organisation of ideas presented with a focus point.

Decide on Controlling Idea

The thesis is the ‘seed’ or the ‘nucleus’, and the development of the paragraph is an organic process. The subsequent sentences of the paragraph would have a recurrent relationship with the thesis or the controlling idea as branches growing out of the stem of a plant.

Hence, the first step is to decide on the topic sentence or the controlling idea. For this, narrow your topic enough to support it well in one paragraph. If your topic runs into more than one paragraph, then it would become an essay.

The controlling idea should be clear with no ambiguities. It may be an unconventional statement, but the intent should be clear. You can decide where to place your controlling idea: as an announcement in the beginning, as a revelation of intent in the middle of the paragraph or as the logical

conclusion of all the ideas mentioned in the paragraph at the end. The controlling idea would be a generalised statement.

Body of the paragraph

The information that you will use will be in the context of the controlling idea. The subsequent sentences will be related to the controlling idea in one way or the other. The information you use might comprise reasons, interpretations, examples, names, references, numbers and senses that support your controlling idea. In this portion, you sell your idea, i.e. bring the reader to your point of view.

Use graphic organisers or mind maps.

Before launching on the actual writing, it is advisable to jot down the ideas and work on a framework regarding the organisation of ideas, whether they would follow the main point and details, compare and contrast, sequence, problem and solution pattern. Place the ideas in a graphic format like a webchat, a flow chart, a table, an inverted tree diagram or a Venn diagram as discussed in the previous unit. This mind map will give a clear idea of how the topic will develop and if anything has been left out.

Begin to write. Get to the point as quickly as you can. Use formal language, avoid contractions. Do not use first or second-person pronouns. Ensure that all tenses match. The sentences should not be very complicated but should be varied in structure. Try to write emphatic sentences. They should relate to the controlling idea and move logically. Use connectors, linkers and discourse markers so that the reader can logically understand the connection between your controlling idea, the point or opinion. Your transitional sentences should prepare the reader for the next idea.

Use examples or concrete evidence to support your ideas. Avoid fragmentary paragraphs which jump from idea to idea in a jerky unconvincing fashion. They also indicate a weak writer's stance. Avoid irrelevancies in your paragraphs.

Concluding Sentence

The concluding sentence sums up or reiterates the main idea and reinforces the point or opinion. It reminds the reader of the relevance of the information. You should be satisfied that you have fulfilled the reader's expectations established by the controlling idea. In the end, remember, your paragraph is a mirror of you. You would have shared something of your personality into your paragraph!

6.4 WHAT IS STYLE?

Style is the way something is said, done, expressed or performed. In a way, the figures of speech used to embellish any kind of discourse come under style. Style reveals the writer's personality and 'voice' because the structures, the diction and the figures of speech a writer chooses depend on his or her personality, attitude towards the topic or the audience and ideology. The style

also depends upon the purpose of writing and the audience. The purpose impacts the major rhetorical mode of any piece of writing and is the most important deciding factor. Hence a written composition can be narrative, academic or scholarly, descriptive, argumentative or literary, depending upon the purpose.

The audience, too, determines the writer's diction or vocabulary, the structure of the sentences (complex or simple) and the extent of the figures of thought or speech, such as metaphors or oxymorons.

Initially, these factors govern the writer's style, but slowly a personal style evolves, which makes the writer distinguishable from others. This may be called the signature style of a writer. As F.L. Lucas (1894-1967) said, "...not one of us can put pen to paper, or even open his mouth, without giving something of himself away to shrewd observers.." He further goes on to say, "Words can be more powerful, and more treacherous, than we sometimes suspect; communication more difficult than we may think."

In communication, many things come into play. One is the writer's perception of self, which may be different from his/ her real self, the reader's perception of the writer and similarly the reader's real self and perception of self. All these influence the process of 'meaning-making, and we know that the interpretations of a piece of writing may be many and divergent. Therefore, a writer must try to gain mastery over the language and learn how to express feelings or ideas.

6.4.1 Different Kinds of Style

There are different kinds of styles in which a topic can be presented. A journalist would need to vary his or her style according to the audience and the purpose.

Concise Style

In concise style, the writer expresses thoughts or provides information in the fewest possible words employing only such terms as are most expressive. Ideas are not repeated, and figures of speech are employed sparingly. The sentences are compact with no vague or redundant expression. A writer, however, needs to see that in doing so, clarity is not lost, and the transitions are not abrupt. A journalist may use this style to report the news.

Plain Style

The plain style rejects embellishments of any kind. The prose is simple, direct, and easily understandable. Three things govern this style: purity, propriety and precision. The writer aims to inform or narrate, which he/she may do with force or vivacity but will not make any special effort to capture the reader's attention. Reporting events or news on non-controversial issues would follow this style.

Elegant or Graceful Style

This style contains figurative language in the right measure. The words used

are the most appropriate, and the units of the sentence are arranged with such care that they enhance the beauty of each other. The prose appears spontaneous in which metaphors, allusions and thoughts are woven carefully. In a way, 'it pleases the fancy and the ear while it informs the understanding; and conveys the ideas, clothed with all the beauty of expression, but not overcharged with any of its misplaced finery.' It has charm, a perfect harmony of thought and diction, ease and refinement.

Forcible and Vehement Styles

A piece written in the forcible style is plain, distinct and impressive, which reveals a writer who is firmly convinced of the truth of the idea he/she is expressing. This author is deeply interested in the subject and is convinced of the importance of conveying the idea to others. The writer employs vigorous arguments that are sound and convincing, related and adapted to the subject, topic or theme and reveal a disciplined mind.

Example:

The arguments are vigorous, and the writer has made his stand very clear. He is convinced that force is not the best option to subjugate the races America was trying to control. The style's distinct, impressive and the prose dignified. But it makes its point because the arguments are convincing.

Such writing would find its place in the editorial column where the editor or seasoned journalists, or senior experts in a field present their views on issues that are debatable.

When the forcible style is tempered with a highly excited state of feeling, we get what can be called.

Vehement style.

Writing can be classified into some other kinds of style like the florid style, the vehement style and the dignified style. The major ones have been discussed in this section.

6.4.2 Passive and Active Structures

The use of passive voice is prevalent in expository or argumentative writing to emphasise the receiver of action and lessen the remarks that the writer does not want to emphasise. A truth or an opinion can, thus, be presented in a less acerbic form by putting the idea in a passive construction.

When the person who does a thing is obvious or does not matter, then the passive structure is used to emphasise the act or action and its effects, which are more important.

'The common man has been made the scapegoat' takes away the direct attack made by a statement like this: 'They have made the common man suffer for this!'

Passive structures are more impersonal. However, passive structures should not be used consistently throughout the written piece, making the writing

weak and unconvincing. Where things need to be said directly, they must be said so.

6.4.3 Sentence Forms: Use of Periodic Sentence

In contrast, the periodic sentence places the main point in the middle or the end instead of the beginning. Here the main point is modified by the preceding subordinate clauses.

Other techniques could be using exaggeration to attract attention, referring to the reader's imagined personal experiences, using questions to get the reader's attention, using idioms and at times using informal expressions like short forms of verbs.

6.4.4 Attributes of Good Style

Some persons indeed have a talent for writing well and do so effortlessly and naturally. Nevertheless, those who may not be so blessed can train themselves to write effectively. In his article 'What is style?' F.L. Lucas has listed a few things you may consider to make your writing graceful and worth reading.

Avoid the use of too many pronouns. 'Far better repeat a noun, a name, than puzzle the reader, even for a moment with ambiguous pronouns. For with too many 'he' or she', the reader gets confused about who is being referred to.

The next point he mentions is the rhyming clusters or jingles. There is a repetition of the syllable 'port' in the following sentence: 'The enemy is *reported* to have seized this *important port* and, and reinforcements are hurrying up in *support*.'

Lucas also warns against using too many relative clauses, which he compares to a string of sausages or Chinese boxes, one inside another. He would prefer shorter sentences with a lesser number of explanatory or informative clauses attached to them. It would be better to break and begin a new sentence if many ideas related to a point. The use of jargon should be avoided or kept to a minimum if the writing is for the general public.

The two cornerstones of style, according to him, respect for truth and respect for the readers. This will ensure **honesty and courtesy** in writing. It is better, to be honest, and present one's true self rather than carrying on a pretence, which does not last long and as we said earlier, writing reveals the author and readers are intelligent and discerning.

The next important point is **courtesy and respect for the reader**. Many things follow naturally from this courtesy, and the first is clarity. It is not nice on the part of the writer to puzzle or confuse the reader. It is essential to ensure that the reader can understand without any effort or struggle. Certain famous writers have tried their writing on their servants and modified them accordingly to ensure clarity and comprehension.

The other principle that a writer needs to adhere to is **brevity**. If one can say a thing in a few words, one must not ramble before coming to the point. It is

not nice to waste the reader's time. Short and effective expressions are more valuable than waxing eloquent.

When French Marshals turned their backs on him at a reception, Wellington said, 'I have seen their backs before.' This is a very profound statement and speaks volumes. Any attempt to lengthen the sentence would diffuse it or make it ineffective. It is often seen that wordiness or redundancy affects the clarity of the sentence. Hence these are best avoided.

Clarity is not the same as using many words to make a thing clearer. The statement may become confusing or bewildering for the reader who tries to search for the idea from amongst the numerous words in which it is clothed.

Clarity and brevity are the basic requisites. But they need to be accompanied with **variety, good humour, good sense, vitality and imagination**. Variety can be attained by varying the sentence length and structure to avoid 'monotony of language, rhythm and mood'. So good writers amplify their vocabulary and diversify their tone. This means that serious writing can be solemn at places, which can be relieved by a humorous expression, thus relieving the boredom and strengthening the point.

Vitality and imagination can be obtained through the use of metaphor and simile or by drawing analogies. Some common symbols and icons are understandable, and metaphors and similes can help provide a concrete idea that can be visualised and understood. The idea can be clear and the expression simple, yet the writer can convey a lot through the help of these simple tools.

In his book 'On Writing, Stephen King has expressed how adjectives can make the writing dull and bland. Instead, if the situation is presented through metaphor or visualisation, the writing becomes vivid and vigorous.

The sentence "The mountain that lay behind the hill loomed large over the town, obscuring it with its shadow every sunrise," creates a mental picture which the use of the adjective 'huge' or 'immense' might not have been able to do. It is also argued that 'much of the meaning can be conveyed not through words but with effective and clever punctuation'.

The requisites of a good style would include the following:

- 1) Effective syntax where the main point is identifiable
- 2) Nominalisation means avoiding too many pronouns
- 3) Using discourse markers to indicate the relationship between sentences and ideas.
- 4) Varying between loose and periodic sentences according to the need
Using metaphor or simile, visualisation to concretise abstract concepts
Avoiding repetition.
- 5) Using the active voice unless otherwise required
Using good-natured humour, whenever possible
- 6) Using effective diction and avoiding the use of a word
Avoiding cliches

- 7) Being convinced of the topic or idea Being clean and honest with the reader Having respect for the reader
- 8) Avoiding wordiness and redundancy

The elegant style is the most impressive, having the right diction, suitable metaphors and appropriate figures of speech.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1. What are the attributes of a well-written paragraph?

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- 2. When would a journalist use passive voice in writing?

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- 3. What are the important requisites of a good writing style?

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6.5 LET US SUM UP

Journalistic writing has certain features and differs from literary writing, for it includes different genres. Yet, we may say that the rules that govern any good writing govern journalistic writing too.

In this unit, it was explained that the paragraph is at the heart of all writing, and it has to be well organised and should have a topic sentence or a controlling idea with other points that offer details or illustrations. It is a complete composition in itself, and it should have unity, coherence and transitions. Any kind of longer composition should have a thesis statement which can occur anywhere in the first paragraph. It would have unity and coherence in the paragraphs.

The written product is governed by the purpose, the audience, and the place where the writing will appear. All writing should have economy, simplicity and clarity as to their hallmarks. In addition, the writer can use certain tools to increase its readability by using visualisation, good humour, the concretisation of abstract ideas through metaphor and simile and using punctuation cleverly to provide the intended meaning concisely.

6.6 FURTHER READINGS

1. Dash, A. (2008). *Journalistic writing*. New Delhi: Sonali Publications
2. Gurdon, M. (2007). *Write on!*. London: New Holland
3. Hicks, W., Adams, S., Gilbert, H., & Holmes, T. (2010). *Writing for Journalists*. London: Routledge

6.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. A well-written story should be simple, clear and use the least possible words to convey the point properly.
2. The two most important factors that determine the style of a story are the language used in the presentation of matter and the thought behind writing the story.
3. A clearly understood written piece would have moderate matter presented in an elegant style.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. Attributes of a well-written paragraph are:
 - Unity – one general idea covered in the paragraph
 - Coherence – sentences follow a clear, logical sequence
 - Completeness – enough is said about the idea to make it convincing.
2. A journalist uses the passive voice in argumentative writing to emphasise the receiver of action and to lessen the remarks that the writer does not want to emphasise.
3. Clarity and brevity, variety, good humour, good sense, vitality and imagination, are the basic requisites of a good writing style.