

Writing tips

Digital reader masterclass:
Three practical writing techniques

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Reading in a linear pattern

Our mobile devices make us scroll while reading. New research suggests that we read not in an F-shaped pattern only, but instead in a linear pattern. Read more about reading patterns here:

- <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/>
- <https://garciamedia.com/blog/linear-storytelling-and-retention-levels/>
- <https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/2020/> [Only in Danish].

Paragraphs

A paragraph should consist of two things:

- 1. Topic sentence.** Describe the topic briefly and concisely, as it is easier for the reader to understand a general topic than a specific detail. Your topic sentence must therefore contain information that your reader can relate to – whether based on knowledge, attitude, or interest. It can be one of various different kinds of information, e.g., a conclusion, a problem, or a focus. The most important thing is that the topic sentence covers all the content that is in a paragraph. Never use references or connectors in the topic sentence.
- 2. Elaborating sentences.** After the topic sentence, you can write about specific conditions and details. This can be the information that fleshes out the topic with examples or answers the questions that the topic raises. In the elaborating sentences, you can use connectors.

Example

Text A

Loneliness affects all population groups across social rank and condition, education, gender, and age, and today it is estimated that 350,000 adults in Denmark are seriously lonely. What's worse: The number seems to be rising for all age groups. And loneliness is deadly. We know that prolonged loneliness leads to depression. Many studies suggest that lonely people are also at risk of high blood pressure and high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, fatigue, sleep disorders and pain. It has also been shown that poor or, lack of, social relationships increase the risk of premature death. The National Board of Health estimates that 2 people die a day due to loneliness. In addition, loneliness is not only a problem for the individual, but it also has financial consequences. We know that the many lonely people cost the hospitals 23,000 more admissions annually compared to the rest of the population, and the general practitioners receive 400,000 visits a year from the lonely. And 800,000 sick days a year are due to illness caused by loneliness.

Text B

Loneliness affects all population groups. There is **thus** loneliness across social rank and condition, education, gender, and age. Today, we estimate that 350,000 adults in Denmark are seriously lonely. What's worse: The number seems to be rising for all age groups.

People get sicker and die earlier when they are lonely. We know, **for example**, that prolonged loneliness leads to depression, and many studies suggest that lonely people also risk high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, fatigue, sleep disorders and pain. It has also been shown that poor, or lack of, social relationships increase the risk of premature death. The National Board of Health estimates that 2 people die a day due to loneliness.

Loneliness is not only a problem for the individual, but it also has financial consequences. **In fact**, the many lonely people cost the hospitals 23,000 more hospitalizations annually compared to the rest of the population, and that the general practitioners receive 400,000 more visits a year from the lonely. And 800,000 sick days a year are due to illness caused by loneliness.

Explanation

Your text becomes easier to read if you clearly divide the text into topics and let each section reflect one topic. If you have three topics, write three paragraphs.

Notice how text A begins with a long sentence, which contains a lot of specific information. This does not qualify as a topic sentence. A paragraph should begin with a topic sentence. After the topic sentence, it is a good idea to explicitly show how the individual sentences and information belong together: You do this with connectors.

In text B, the topic sentences are underlined, and the connectors are **red**.

Headings

There are two types of heading and they are good for different things: topic headings and narrative headings.

- 1. Topic headings.** The reader uses these to categorize your information at a general level. So they are also good at the top heading levels (generally the headings used in the table of contents). The topic headings can consist of one or more words, but never a sentence. They can describe a topic, e.g., "Authority supervision", or they describe a purpose, e.g., "Introduction".

Narrative headings. The reader uses narrative headings to remember conclusions and who does (or must do) something. The narrative headings are specific and must be formulated as a whole sentence, for example: The Ministry of Taxation does not comply with the rules on tax collection “ (if we instead formulate this narrative heading as a topic heading, it could read: “The Ministry of Taxation’s tax collection “).

Narrative headings are especially good for simple conclusions and when you want to highlight in a text that someone needs to do something. This makes them ideal for e-mails where the reader has to remember or do something, e.g., “Send the information within 10 days”.

Headings should be short and comprehensive

Headings should be short - if they are too long, they lose their function. Headings must also be comprehensive, which means that there must be nothing in a section that is not covered by the heading. The heading should help the reader to quickly see which topics a text contains.

Explanations

Begin explanations with words the reader understands.

This technique contains 2 steps:

- 1. Use familiar words at the beginning of a sentence.** In this location, place words and concepts that your reader knows in advance or that you have already explained. We call this location a ‘topic field’ because what you read here (first), you understand to be the topic of the sentence. The topic field is the first 4 to 5 words of the sentence. The reader finds your text understandable if they know the words in the topic field.
- 2. With difficult words, put them at the end of a sentence the first time you use them.** We call the end of the sentence (the last 4 or 5 words) the focus field because this is where the reader subconsciously sets out to hear more about the topic.

You can vary how you use this technique, to suit your text. Two options are:

- 1.** Explain the word before using it for the first time (as with “acalculia” in example 1 and “capacitive technology” in example 2).
- 2.** Don’t explain the word before using it but put it in a focus field and follow up with an explanation in the following sentence (as with “parietal lobe of the brain” in example 1).

Example 1

Text A

If **acalculia** occurs alone, it is usually due to a lesion in the left **parietal lobe of the brain**. Acalculia may occur alone or with other disorders.

Text B

If you lose the ability to calculate and process numbers, you suffer from **acalculia**. Acalculia may occur alone or with other disorders. If acalculia occurs alone, it is usually due to a lesion in the left **parietal lobe of the brain**. It's the part of the brain that...

Explanation

Text A is fine if our reader knows the words “acalculia” and “parietal lobe”. If the reader does not, then the words must be explained as in Text B, where both words appear for the first time in the focus field. We explain “acalculia” before we use it. “Parietal lobe” we do not explain before we use it, but we explain it afterwards. So, this is an example of how the technique can be varied.

Example 2

Capacitive technology

You probably do not think about it in everyday life, but every time you touch the screen of your phone, you set in motion a series of advanced registrations and calculations that make your phone touch sensitive. There are various technologies that can make a screen touch sensitive, but today most phones use **capacitive technology**. This is a technology that consists of grids of small electrical conductors that are transparent and located on top of the LCD screen and can detect touches.

The conductors are arranged in a network of electrodes and create an electric field. When you tap the screen with your finger, your touch becomes measurable because you affect the electrostatic field. So, your body acts as an electrical conductor, which a small chip translates into a command in your phone.

Explanation

This explanation of “capacitive technology” begins with a situation that most people know: touching a mobile phone. Note that “capacitive technology” appears for the first time in the focus field. After this, the explanation continues with elaborations.