

PARAGRAPH THEORY: BAIN AND NOW

by

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B. A., Kansas State University, 1978

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1982

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Paragraph theory includes the historical definition of the paragraph; the purpose of the paragraph; the length of the paragraph; the association and relationships of sentences within the paragraph; the appropriateness of the paragraph's sentences as related to the subject of the paragraph; and consideration of the role the paragraph performs in an entire written composition.

Modern presentations of paragraph theory occur in theoretical pieces by Frank D'Angelo, W. Ross Winterowd, Albert R. Kitzhaber, Paul Rodgers, Jr., Ned A. Shearer, Francis Christensen, A. L. Becker, Josephine Miles, David H. Karrfalt, Richard Braddock, Arthur A. Stern, Leo Rockas,¹ and in such widely adopted college composition textbooks as Sheridan Baker's The Complete Stylist and Handbook, Donald Hall's Writing Well, William C. Irmischer's The Holt Guide to English, James M. McCrimmon's Writing With A Purpose, and A. M. and Charlene Tibbetts' Strategies of Rhetoric.

This report will attempt to ascertain whether modern paragraph theory has been altered by recent theory or whether it is still dominated by the conception developed by Alexander Bain in his English Composition and Rhetoric ([American ed., rev.] New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866). In that work Bain, a Scottish philosopher and Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Aberdeen, defined the paragraph as "a collection of sentences with unity of purpose which handles and exhausts a distinct topic."² Bain gave six rules, or "principles that govern the structure of the paragraph for all kinds of composition":

- I. The first requisite of the paragraph is,
that the bearing of each sentence upon what

precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable.

II. When several consecutive sentences iterate or illustrate the same idea, they should, as far as possible, be formed alike. This may be called the rule of Parallel Construction.

III. The opening sentence, unless so constructed as to be obviously preparatory, is expected to indicate with prominence the subject of the paragraph.

IV. A paragraph should be consecutive, or free from dislocation.

V. The paragraph should possess unity; which implies a definite purpose, and forbids digressions and irrelevant matter.

VI. As in the sentence, so in the paragraph, a due proportion should obtain between principal and subordinate statements.³

When Bain confronted his first composition classes at the University of Aberdeen in the mid-nineteenth century, he could find no adequate textbook and, therefore, undertook the writing of his own. The inclusion of paragraph material in that book may well have come as a result of his observations of composition students' writing problems. In his textbook, for example, Bain suggests that "confining of each paragraph to a distinct topic avoids some of the worst faults of composition" (151). Even though Bain was primarily a teacher and writer, not a rhetorician, the logical

approach, evolving from his major fields of psychology and philosophy, allowed him to approach writing problems by applying problem-solving methods.

Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., in his article investigating Bain's role in paragraph theory, has made the following observation: "By 1860 the average English sentence contained only about half as many words as the average sentence in Shakespeare's day. But, there now were many more sentences; unity and coherence were becoming more and more difficult to secure at the paragraph level."⁴ Students could write short coherent sentences, but when asked to write longer pieces of discourse their writing did not exhibit unity and coherence. For the logical mind of Bain, there may have appeared a lapse of continuity between the students' sentences when they were placed in groups, with a resulting absence of unity and coherence in the paragraph as a whole. As a result of these observations, the section of his textbook on the paragraph has the concept of unity as its core, and coherence is repeatedly emphasized. The paragraph for Bain was "a collection of sentences with unity of purpose . . . a paragraph handles and exhausts a distinct topic."⁵

For some time prose writers had been demonstrating solutions to the very problems Bain's composition students were experiencing. Organic unity in the paragraph was exhibited in the eighteenth century by "men such as Addison, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Johnson, Hume, Burke," says Edwin H. Lewis. "And, the nineteenth century paragraph [in the work of Thomas MacCauley, for example] was far more highly organized, its unity tighter, its handling of proportion and mass more sensitive, its coherence less overtly contrived, the emphasis of its short sentences more keenly felt and more effectually employed."⁶ Bain's decision to include considerations

of the paragraph in his textbook may have been encouraged by the great gap between works of contemporary writers and the writing attempts of students, as he found that the writers had succeeded with the paragraph while the students did not.

Because of the above reasons, it is understandable that paragraph-writing came into attention in composition coursework in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Rhetoric had developed originally in oral form, and paragraphs do not exist in spoken discourse. The principles of rhetoric applied more to speaking in ancient times and began in the middle ages to give attention to writing. However, identification of blocks of discourse set in the paragraph, in the modern conception, develops in the nineteenth century. Blocks of discourse containing a single idea, a mid-nineteenth-century development, is the conception of the paragraph in this paper. Written contexts give rise to the paragraph, says Barrett Wendell, where the function is comparable to that of punctuation, "to do for the eye what vocal pauses and stress do for the ear,--to show what parts of a composition belong together, and among those parts to indicate the most significant."⁷ So, the paragraph was attended to.

One of the more interesting aspects of the subject concerns the extent to which Bain may have been influenced in the formation of his paragraph theory by his predecessors. He would have received no help from his most illustrious predecessors, George Campbell, Richard Whateley, and Hugh Blair, who did not discuss the paragraph, but Bain was apparently acquainted with the textbooks of two Englishmen, Lindley Murray's An English Grammar, 1808, and Joseph Angus' Handbook of the English Tongue, 1861. Both of these did give attention to the paragraph.

Murray, whose textbook was widely used in the early nineteenth century, was clearly concerned with paragraph structure and the ways a paragraph deals with its subject:

I. Different subjects, unless they are very short, or very numerous in small compass, should be separated into paragraphs.

II. When one subject is continued to a considerable length, the larger divisions of it should be put into paragraphs.

III. The facts, premises, and conclusion, of a subject, sometimes naturally point out the separations into paragraphs; and each of these, when of great length, will again require subdivisions at their most distinctive parts.

IV. In cases which require a connected subject to be formed into several paragraphs, a suitable turn of expression, exhibiting the connexion of the broken parts, will give beauty and force to the division.⁸

Not long before Bain's textbook was published, Joseph Angus' textbook was published in London. In his chapter on "Hints on Composition" he includes the following material on paragraphs.

A paragraph is a combination of sentences, intended to explain or illustrate, or prove, or apply some truth; or to give the history

of events during any definite period of time,
 or in relation to any one subject of thought.
 . . . Paragraphs require the element of unity
 as much as sentences. . . . A paragraph has
 one subject, which in various ways the sentences
 illustrate and explain. . . . Properly a para-
 graph has one theme which may be stated in the
 margin, or at the beginning, or at the close,
 or at both beginning and close, or which may
 be implied only. Paragraphs of the last kind
 have a defect in clearness.⁹

Bain, then, was not the first to propose rules about paragraphs, but Bain was more dogmatic than either Murray or Angus.

A closer look at Bain's principles, listed on pages one and two of this report, reveals the considerations he included. The first principle considers coherence, while the second recommends parallel construction. The third principle calls for a statement of the topic in the opening sentence, in most cases. Logical ordering of sentences is the concern of the fourth principle. Unity is primary in the fifth, and proportion is attended to in the sixth principle. Emphasized in these rules primarily is the principle of unity, for it is the consideration of Rules IV, V, and VI.

Murray and Bain are not alike in emphasis or content. However, the "rules" prescribed by Angus and Bain are similar, regarding unity, but it does not appear that Bain copied the principles of Angus.

In their writings Murray and Angus had only hinted at a connection between the construction of sentences and paragraphs, but Bain asserted its

existence. Bain, in English Composition and Rhetoric, 1887, a later textbook claims that "the consideration of the Unity of the individual Sentence leads up to the structure of the Paragraph, as composed of sentences properly parted off."¹⁰ Ned Shearer has a different hypothesis. "Bain's major intellectual pursuit was that of association psychology,"¹¹ says Shearer. Bain's paragraph theory, he suggests, is not so much an outgrowth of sentence theory as it is a logical result of Bain's associationist psychology.

After Bain, later nineteenth-century rhetoricians took up this work. The emphasis on written discourse was growing in America as it was in England. In America, textbooks written as early as 1827 reflected the shift in attention from oral to written rhetoric, and the stress was placed on written composition and belletristic study. But few Americans went as far as Bain to recognize completely the organic nature of the paragraph. Many looked at the paragraph differently, not seeing it as a distinct entity but rather as a by-product of a group of sentences. Frequently, coherence received emphasis, but unity seldom did.

Bain's work wasn't significantly recognized in America until after 1885. As teachers responded to the changes needed for appropriate paragraph instruction, however, paragraph theory saw much development in the 1890's. "Bain's conception," according to Rodgers, "was elaborated and enforced chiefly by John McElroy, John Genung, Barrett Wendell, Fred Scott and Joseph Denney, George R. Carpenter, and Charles Sears Baldwin."¹²

Subsequent to Bain's definition of the paragraph as "a collection of sentences with unity of purpose," attempts were made by several textbook

writers to improve the definition of the paragraph, but they didn't alter Bain's original conception. Examples:

A. D. Hepburn, 1875: "a connected series of sentences containing the development of a single topic."

T. W. Hunt, 1884: "a collection of sentences unified by some common idea."

John McElroy, 1885: (a sentence cluster)
"relating to one particular point in a discourse."

John Genung, 1886: "a connected series of sentences constituting the development of a single topic."

Fred N. Scott and Joseph V. Denney, 1896:
"a unit of discourse developing a single idea . . . [consisting of] a group or series of sentences closely related to one another and to the thoughts expressed by the whole group or series."¹³

By the end of the nineteenth century Bain's view had become standard in America.

The influence of Bain's work and the modifications of it are apparent in the textbooks of five late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American rhetoricians, Barrett Wendell, John Genung, Fred N. Scott and Joseph V. Denney, and Charles Sears Baldwin.

Barrett Wendell's English Composition, 1891, written because he had "found none that seemed quite simple enough for the popular reader,"¹⁴ is

composed of lectures Wendell presented to Lowell Institute students of composition. He believed the paragraph had been generally neglected and further stated he had found no textbook of rhetoric that gives any satisfactory definition of paragraphs.

Wendell defines the paragraph as follows: "A paragraph is to a sentence what a sentence is to a word. The principles which govern the arrangement of sentences in paragraphs, then are identical with those that govern the arrangement of words in sentences" (vii). This reads quite simply, which is his intention, but the definition cannot stand alone; the function of the words in a sentence must be understood.

Wendell also wants his readers and students to keep in mind "that paragraphs ought to be as definitely organized as sentences themselves" (119). Wendell stresses good use, saying every talker and writer must conform to "good use," ["the test of words we should use is the usage of those who speak and write it best" (16)] and concludes that a paragraph sensibly composed is a good paragraph. In keeping with his plan to simplify paragraph theory, Wendell states that "the only kinds of paragraphs are the long and the short but adds that . . . what a long paragraph is, or a short, it is not easy to say" (121). The considerations of "good use" and paragraph length were not concerns of Bain.

Wendell, like Bain, names unity as a primary requirement of paragraph composition. After Wendell discusses matters of paragraph use, he presents three principles as the simplest guide in considering paragraph composition: Unity, Mass, and Coherence. To define Unity Wendell looks at several speeches by well-known authors and concludes "that the type of paragraph that possesses unity is a single speech in a dialogue" (123). The test for Unity is that the substance of a paragraph be stated in a single sentence.

The principle of Mass dictates "that the chief parts of each composition should be so placed as readily to catch the eye" (126-7). Mass means that the beginning and end of the paragraph hold the chief ideas. Mass is illustrated by "A paragraph whose unity can be demonstrated by summarizing its substance in a sentence whose subject shall be a summary of its opening sentence, and whose predicate shall be a summary of its sentences, is theoretically well-massed" (129). "Due proportion should subsist between principle and subordinate matter" (132). Also, a consideration of Mass is the emphasis the writer wants to make in the paragraph.

The third principle, Coherence, governs the internal structure of the paragraph. This principle directs the writer thus: "The relation of each part of a composition to its neighbor should be unmistakable" (134). This sounds very like Bain's first principle, "that the bearing on each sentence upon what precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable."¹⁵ The third principle, stated simply by Wendell, is that "matters connected in thought should be kept together, matters distinct in thought kept apart" (136-7). Wendell's Coherence principle deals with material Bain had included, the rule of parallel construction. Coherence, also, deals with connectives, and here Wendell refers to Bain's Rhetoric as containing connectives by the dozens. Connectives are any words in one clause or sentence that refer to the preceding clause or sentence. Wendell realizes his rules sound rigid or dogmatic, but he concludes that there are only two ways to construct a paragraph--the right way and the wrong way.

Wendell's textbook offers the student principles of Unity, Mass, and Coherence which do not conflict with Bain's theory. Parts even seem to come directly from Bain, but it is evident Wendell's principles do not have as

broad a focus as Bain's. In his efforts to simplify paragraph instructions he shortened and narrowed previous theory.

From John Genung's Practical Elements of Rhetoric, 1886, to his Outlines of Rhetoric, 1895, there is no alteration of his definition of the paragraph as "a connected series of sentences constituting the development of a single topic."¹⁶ In addition to the presentation of his theory of rhetoric, the Professor of Rhetoric, Amherst College, added written exercises to his later textbook, "designed to cultivate in progressive and systematic order the student's sense of the leading requisites of composition."¹⁷

Genung's attention to the quality of unity, plus his rules of paragraph construction, directly follow Bain's principles. Genung's rules [here in an order corresponding to Bain's principles] are:

1. Continuity requires that the sentences making up the paragraph should be so related to one another, in thought and structure, that they may be naturally recognized as consecutive steps in a progressing thought.
 . . . To preserve continuity in the paragraph, the exact relation of the constituent sentences to one another, as also the relation between paragraphs themselves, must be distinctly indicated.
2. The principles of parallel construction
 . . . hold in the structure of the paragraph.
3. Whether stated or not a definite topic

should exist in the writer's mind; he must work carefully to it . . . (Outlines, 222)

4. Its [paragraph's] ideal is to have the current of thought absolutely continuous and interrelated from beginning to end, one unbroken progress. (Outlines, 228)

5. . . . subordinate or digressive ideas should receive a different distribution of emphasis, and not usurp the place where the main ideas are naturally looked for.

6. A due proportion needs to be maintained between principal and subordinate ideas in the paragraph.¹⁸

Additionally, Genung states, "The paragraph is a distinct division of the discourse . . . a link in a larger chain, but complete in itself, and exhaustive of its topic . . . and a good test of the subject of the paragraph is its being so constructed that an abstract of it can be made in one phrase or sentence."¹⁹

Paragraph-Writing, 1893, by Fred N. Scott and Joseph V. Denney, the University of Michigan, aimed "to make the paragraph the basis of a method of composition."²⁰ The making and remaking of units is the task of all who undertake written discourse, and learning to give unity and coherence to one's ideas is necessary to writing well, say the authors. The paragraph offers several advantages over the sentence and the essay as a structural unit for composition students to attend to. Scott and Denney found that

sentences were not planned beforehand and the essay was so large and complex that it could not be used in their explanation to students. Included in their text was the following quote from Bain's English Composition and Rhetoric, 1887:

Adapting an old homely maxim, we may say,
Look to the Paragraphs, and the Discourse will
look to itself, for, although a discourse as a
whole has a method or plan suited to its nature,
yet the confining of each paragraph to a distinct
topic avoids some of the worst faults of Compo-
sition; besides which, he that fully comprehends
the method of a paragraph will also comprehend
the method of an entire work. (vi)

In order for the student to improve his paragraph-writing, the textbook directs his attention to unity, clearness, and force, concepts that sound remarkably Wendellian:

1) Unity, or oneness, by means of which the
reader recognizes that some one, particular,
significant thing or idea, and nothing else,
is being presented; 2) Clearness, or intelli-
gibility by means of which he understands what
is said of that one thing or idea; 3) Force,
or emphasis, by means of which both the thing
and idea and what is said of it are firmly
impressed on his mind. (260)

There are general laws, according to Scott and Denney, that a para-
graph, whether related (part of whole essay) or isolated (complete, a

composition in miniature), is subject to unity, selection, proportion, sequence, and variety. Unity is of most importance, for the sentences of the paragraph must be conveyed in thought and of one purpose, and unity forbids digression and irrelevant matter. Selection means that only sentences should be chosen that serve the purpose of the paragraph, giving force and distinction to the paragraph's main idea. Proportion requires that enough be said for the reader to understand; details should be amplified in proportion to their respective importance to the main idea of the paragraph. The sequence of the paragraph generally develops in the natural ordering of sentences as dictated by the developing thought of the writer of each paragraph. The law of variety requires as much diversity as the paragraph will allow in sentence length, sentence structure, phraseology, ordering of details, and overall design of paragraphs. (See Paragraph-Writing, pp. 4-15.)

Additionally, there are directions in this textbook which follow Bain's principles closely:

(Unity) . . . the paragraph shall at no point vary perceptibly from that level of thought or feeling on which the paragraph began. (260)

(Subject of Paragraph) Whether expressed or implied, the topic sentence should exist as a working theme in the mind of the writer while constructing each sentence, and the bearing of each sentence on the paragraph-theme should be distinct and clear. . . . (19)

Scott and Denney investigate why paragraphing is used and needed in written discourse; their attempts demonstrate some psychological base for

paragraphing. In the textbook's section on paragraph theory the organic unity of the paragraph receives explanation, which includes the observation that for continuity of structure the paragraph may employ connectives, inversions, parallel constructions, and so on, for these are "the sign of the paragraph's organic unity, the natural outgrowth and expression of the relating activity of the mind" (105). Paragraph-Writing includes the principles of Alexander Bain yet goes further than Bain in providing explanations for paragraphing as well as exercises for the student.

Charles Sears Baldwin, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric at Yale University, begins his College Manual of Rhetoric, 1902, by stating that there are three fundamental principles that guide composition: unity, coherence, emphasis [Wendell's terms slightly altered]. During its composition "an essay naturally falls into paragraphs corresponding more or less to some division of the subject into parts. It [the paragraph] is a unit, but a component unit . . . governed by the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis."²¹

Baldwin claims that the paragraph is the logical basis of literary form, and he applies the three principles of composition to paragraph construction. The paragraph has unity when it can be summed up in a single sentence. Coherence demands a logical sequence of sentences in a paragraph, and each paragraph has reference to the preceding sentence. These logical connections may be made by conjunctions, by demonstratives, by repetition of important words. The principle of emphasis applies identically to the composition and the paragraph. The parts that explain the theme directly should have prominence so that "the opening of the paragraph is thus regarded

as the natural place, not only for announcing the new point, but also for referring to the last point" (12). Proportion, regarding space given to points in the paragraph, is appropriate to emphasis. Baldwin's discussion of emphasis gives parallel construction as the most natural method of successive expansion.

The logic of paragraph emphasis should in large part be concision. As a matter of rhetoric, Baldwin encourages writers of the paragraph to determine sentence length, not for the sentence alone, but for the whole paragraph. Baldwin says, "a paragraph is commonly defined as a group of sentences with unity of purpose, though a paragraph is not primarily a group of sentences, yet ultimately it must be considered in this aspect" (19).

The material Baldwin presents that can be readily compared to Alexander Bain's paragraph theory concerns unity, parallel construction, opening sentence, sentence placement, and proportion. In addition to these principles, Baldwin has expanded his discussion of the paragraph with points regarding coherence and emphasis [terms used earlier by Wendell], words Bain does not use, but concepts he affirms.

Thus, no notable alterations or departures from Bain's conception of the paragraph occurred by 1900. Wording was altered, qualifications were made, and attempts at simplifications were tried by Bain's successors, but the six rules were not dismissed. These principles were used in part or in total by late nineteenth-century rhetoricians when judging criteria for paragraph composition. Additions were made by rhetoricians to include emphases of their own, but Bain's principles served them as the groundwork from which to begin.

In 1953, Albert R. Kitzhaber stated that "nothing new has been added to paragraph theory since the crest of its vogue in the 1890's."²² Bain had

laid down six hard-and-fast rules and a definition for the paragraph that held, but Bain's rules applied only to the expository paragraph with logical pattern.

Following the 1800's the paragraph was an inevitable feature of composition textbooks. Barrett Wendell offered the fullest discussion, states Kitzhaber, up to the 1890's when he presented his triad of Unity, Mass, and Coherence, but this theory was too rigid to be of much practical value.

After Scott and Denney published Paragraph-Writing in 1893, every textbook, with few exceptions, dealt with the paragraph in detail. By the turn of the century the paragraph was, according to Kitzhaber, "one of the main staples of rhetorical doctrine" (255). The idea of making the paragraph the center of composition training came from Scott and Denney, for the paragraph was ideally suited for organizing thoughts into units of written discourse. In order to formulate their paragraph theory, Scott and Denney had gathered together the principles of earlier writers, and, seemingly, innovations in paragraph theory came to a halt in the nineteenth century with their textbook.

The work of Wendell, Genung, Scott and Denney, and Baldwin, along with the summary of Kitzhaber, all show that the successors of Bain in the nineteenth century did not dismiss or discount Bain's paragraph theory, but they did attempt to make it more workable for instruction.

It is appropriate at this time to see if there is a twentieth-century theorist who challenges Bain or who goes beyond Bain. Paragraph theory has

received significant attention in the past twenty years. A number of authors have published books on contemporary rhetoric in recent years, among them Frank J. D'Angelo and W. Ross Winterowd.

The purpose of D'Angelo's A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric, 1975, is to outline a new approach to rhetoric, a conceptual theory of rhetoric dealing with the relationship between thought and discourse. Structure is central, as structure is central to our ways of understanding, and his book looks at the laws, rules, and conventions of discourse. Here D'Angelo is primarily concerned with discourse which extends beyond the paragraph, but he identifies the paragraph as primarily a sequence of structurally related sentences. "We invent paragraphs, and we discover paragraphs. At times we are highly conscious of the reasons for indenting a particular group of words as a paragraph; at times we are not."²³

D'Angelo's textbook of 1980, Process and Thought in Composition, devotes more attention to the paragraph, offering two ways of looking at paragraphs: "1) the paragraph as a division of a longer piece of writing; 2) . . . a paragraph as a group of logically related sentences, composed of unified parts, based on a single idea. It is possible to view the paragraph as an extended sentence."²⁴

Because D'Angelo believes that a composition is an organic development that begins with an intuitive grasp of the whole, "paragraphing is the process of differentiating the parts within the whole to achieve the writer's purpose" (319). Yet, D'Angelo deals further with the paragraph in more traditional ways when he defines the paragraph as a "collection of sentences on a single subject; the topic sentence expresses the main idea in the paragraph; unity and coherence are achieved when the relationship of every

other sentence and to the main idea is made clear and orderly through logical development and proper transitions" (330-2). D'Angelo believes writing begins with a grasp of the whole. But, he goes on to treat the paragraph in ways similar to Bain.

In Rhetoric, A Synthesis, 1968, Winterowd claims that rhetoric has been static for two hundred years, and although rhetoricians have been at work, no modern rhetoric has emerged. The purpose of this book is to establish a basis for a new kind of rhetoric, to bring together the various fragments of the new rhetoric and to undertake the difficult course of putting things into practice. Winterowd sets Bain's principles aside. Regarding the paragraph, Winterowd explains that the topic sentence generates the paragraph. In his discussion, he includes theories of Francis Christensen and of Kenneth Burke, the latter of whom states that the paragraph can be described according to patterns.

In his textbook, The Contemporary Writer, A Practical Rhetoric, 1981, Winterowd states he does not believe the ability to write coherent paragraphs depends on the ability to explain why paragraphs are coherent, but, "paragraphs hang together because the words in them form chains of meaning."²⁵ However, some paragraphs can be produced by using a three part formula: 1) (T) a topic; 2) (R) a restriction of that topic; 3) (I) one or more illustrations. The topic is a general statement at the beginning, the restriction is a clarification or qualification, and the illustration is an example or instance. These building blocks can be used in a variety of ways; also, paragraphs need to be developed (119). Then, Winterowd supports the above directions with examples, more than by further explanations.

Additionally, Winterowd has compiled a book, Contemporary Rhetoric, 1975, that tries to bring together current knowledge on the state of the art. Particular to the subject of this report is the article by Francis Christensen, "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," published originally in 1965. Winterowd states that Christensen's essay on the paragraph has become a classic in modern rhetoric and his notions do enable students to write better paragraphs.

In his essay Christensen says that he has continued with Bain's definition of paragraph which was loosely based on an analogy with the sentence, but with one difference: there is a precise structural analogy of the paragraph with the cumulative sentence:

The topic sentence of a paragraph is
analogous to the base clause of such a sentence,
and the supporting sentences of a paragraph are
analogous to the added levels of the sentence.
The validity of the analogy is proved by the
fact that a mere change of punctuation will
convert some sentences into paragraphs and
some paragraphs into sentences.²⁶

Christensen's purpose in the article is to show that his claim will stand, that the paragraph has a structure "as definable and traceable as that of the sentence" (234).

All the chapters on paragraphing in present textbooks are nearly alike says Christensen, with prescriptions the same concerning topic sentences and their placement and methods of development, but these are based on analyses that are unworkable. Therefore, Christensen believes the

methods of paragraph development are only that; they are topics for classical rhetoric, not relevant to the paragraph (or sentence). These methods are channels our minds naturally run in, so it is almost impossible to write a paragraph without employing one method or a combination of methods.

Instead of typical prescriptions, according to Christensen, writing methods may be discerned by structural analysis of the paragraph. So, when the topic sentence of the paragraph is thought of as parallel to the base clause of the sentence, most paragraphs exemplify four principles proposed for the rhetoric of the sentence, as follows:

- 1) It is obvious that there could be no paragraphs without addition; 2) when a supporting sentence is added, both writer and reader must see the direction of modification or direction of movement; 3) when sentences are added to develop a topic or subtopic, they are usually, but not always, at a lower level of generality; 4) the more sentences the writer adds, the denser the texture. (235-6)

By using this structural analysis of the sentence the writer can generate paragraphs of greater depth.

Next, nine descriptions of paragraphs are given:

1. The paragraph may be defined as a sequence of structurally related sentences.
2. The top sentence of the sequence is the topic sentence.
3. The topic sentence is nearly always the first sentence in the sequence.

4. Simple sentences are of two sorts--coordinate and subordinate.
5. The two sorts of sequence combine to produce the commonest sort--the mixed sequence.
6. Some paragraphs have no top, no topic, sentence.
7. Some paragraphs have sentences at the beginning or at the end that do not belong to the sequence.
8. Some paragraphing is illogical.
9. Punctuation should be by the paragraph, not by the sentence. (236-48)

Accompanying these approaches are explanations and illustrations.

There are difficulties in defining the paragraph; "the natural impulse is to take as a paragraph whatever lies between two indented sentences, but these typographic criteria are inadequate" (249). Christensen defines the paragraph as a sequence of structurally related sentences (here structure is a matter of subordination and coordination, terms used to describe the internal structure of any paragraph), but it is the paragraph's content that determines what goes with what. A better key to the structure of the paragraph than the typical notion that the topic sentence is the most general or the most abstract sentence of the paragraph is to call the topic sentence "the top sentence of the sequence and describe it as the one the other sentences depend from, the one they develop or amplify, the one they are a comment on" (250). So, through the subordination sequence or coordination sequence paragraphs are generated.

"The paragraph today is just what it has always been since the beginning," says Paul C. Rodgers, Jr. in "A Discourse-centered Rhetoric of the Paragraph," "an expanded sentence--logically, structurally, semantically. . . . Bain's analysis simply does not comprehend what goes on in many sound and effective paragraphs, its successive formulation never has given the student writer adequate guidance."²⁷ Even though Bain's six rules have known considerable refinement and elaboration, Rodgers feels no one has challenged Bain's basic conception of the paragraph. Rodgers, however, finds pitfalls in the key words of Bain's paragraph definition. For example, what is an "idea"? Can a "group" be two sentences or one sentence? Therefore, "the paragraph is what textbooks say it is, except . . . it isn't" (2). So, recent commentators who are faced with paradoxes, for example, "a proper paragraph always has a single central topic idea, except when it has two, three, or more" (2), have rejected traditional theory or ignored it. Rodgers sums up the current situation: "Deduction has failed to yield a fully satisfactory model of the paragraph . . . yet, we have not clearly broken with the past . . . finding some value still in sentence bound tradition" (3).

Rodgers states emphatically that "Rhetoric's proper task is to understand why indentions occur when they do, not to devise some formula for governing the behavior of sentences between breaks [indentions] and to insist upon applying it over and over again throughout all written discourse" (4). Therefore, what Rodgers proposes as the concept of the paragraph is one that will comprehend all paragraphs, a discourse-centered rhetoric of

the paragraph. Inductive analysis of the written paragraph, which Rodgers applies at length to the expository writing of Walter Pater ("Style," 1880), shows what the different possibilities of the paragraph can be. It was found that partitioning can occur at many points in written discourse, some logical, and some not logical, yet acceptable.

While we are trying to determine what The Paragraph is, Rodgers believes we have failed to appreciate what real paragraphs are: "Paragraphs are not composed; they are discovered. To compose is to create; to indent is to interpret" (6). Rodgers then denies that the paragraph can be wrapped up in a tight deductive formula.

"The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences" by Richard Braddock focuses attention on what has occasionally been noted as the flaw in Alexander Bain's principles of paragraph writing: "the opening sentence, unless so constructed as to be obviously preparatory, is expected to indicate with prominence the subject of the paragraph."²⁸ Braddock made a random selection of twenty-five published essays in such magazines as The Atlantic, Harper's, The New Yorker, The Reporter, and The Saturday Review. Then, when he attempted to identify the topic sentences in paragraphs, he quickly ran into difficulty. The essays demonstrated that the notion of the topic sentence was unclear, and definitions offered by current textbooks provided no solutions.

So, Braddock resorted to writing sentence outlines of the essays, omitting transitional and illustrative examples while concentrating on the theses. But, could he place the same interpretations on the writing as the author had? Then, the topic sentences present were noted or written in

where absent, using the author's own words if possible. Also, some authors used "inferred topic sentences," which the reader thought the writer had implied.

The findings were tabulated, and they exposed the following information. First, the topic sentence type greatly varies from one writer to the next. Second, the simple topic sentence [explicit] was used forty-five per cent, and thirty-nine per cent showed assembled topic sentences [implicit] (a statement assembled from parts of sentences throughout the paragraph). The placement of the simple topic sentence in the paragraphs was as follows: placed first forty-seven per cent of the time, as second sentence fifteen per cent, last twelve per cent, and elsewhere twenty-six per cent. Not figured in these percentages were 355 paragraphs which demonstrated delayed-completion, assembled, or inferred topic sentences, not simple topic sentences. Also, at least 128 paragraphs contained no type of topic sentences at all. So, considering all the expository paragraphs in the essays, Braddock estimates that contemporary writers begin paragraphs with a topic sentence only thirteen per cent of the time, that the paragraph ends with the topic sentence only three per cent of the time.²⁹

It is apparent, therefore, that some contemporary writing practices and textbook instructions are far apart, for it is just not true, according to Braddock's findings, that most professionally written paragraphs begin with a stated topic sentence. [Braddock states the findings would not necessarily hold for scientific and technical writing or other types of exposition. Research of the incidence of topic sentences in academic textbooks and scholarly articles would be useful.]

But, Braddock says his findings "do not mean that composition teachers should stop showing their students how to develop paragraphs from clear topic sentences" (323), because some of the paragraphs he researched were not clear or easily read, probably due to the absence of explicit topic sentences.

When English teachers, as classroom students of Arthur A. Stern, were asked to indicate the paragraph indentions in a five hundred word passage of expository writing, they utilized intuitions that were equally correct and acceptable [as the author's had been], but the result was that the passage was divided into two, three, four, or five paragraphs, and of the one hundred "students" only five paragraphed the passage as the author had. In the article, "When Is a Paragraph?," Stern states that the purpose of his experiment was to have the students [teachers] question the adequacy of paragraph theory they had accepted. Stern suspected that too many teachers of the paragraph had not looked at the origins of paragraph theory or tested its validity. Otherwise, why would teachers have difficulty, when the paragraph represents a "distinct unity of thought," recognizing a unit of thought? If every paragraph contains a topic sentence, why can't we identify the same topic sentence?

The problem may well stem from the origin of paragraph theory. Bain's deductive procedure constructed a purely deductive model, but evidently he had made no empirical analysis of actual paragraphs: seemingly Bain's successors refined his conception of the paragraph without questioning its assumption. But, the work by Paul Rodgers and Richard Braddock tests Bain's theory while casting doubt on conclusions reached by Francis

Christensen and A. L. Becker [presented next in this report]. Unlike Braddock, Christensen is willing to accept the term "topic sentence" as self-explanatory, requiring no definition.

What the textbooks are directing, particularly regarding the topic sentence, is not being done in professional writing today. Stern claims that "today's paragraph is not a logical unit, and we should stop telling our students it is."³⁰ Today's paragraph does not always begin with a topic sentence and exhaust a distinct topic; instead, the paragraph is a "flexible, expressive rhetorical instrument" (300).

Stern projects that if we are to "rid ourselves of Bain's legacy . . . we must adopt an approach that describes the internal structure of the paragraph but also the paragraph's external connections with adjoining paragraphs and its function in the discourse as a whole" (299). Stern doesn't believe the paragraph can be taught by rule and formula, so our attention to paragraphs should not be directed at indentations students use but to what they have to say and at making them think about their writing topics rather than correct location of topic sentences.

A. L. Becker's "A Tagmemic Approach to Paragraph Analysis," uses tagmemic theory to describe paragraph structure. Becker defines the tagmeme as:

the class of grammatical forms that function
in a particular grammatical relationship (or
function). They are spots or slots in a
system where substitution is possible. . . .
As composites of both form and function,

tagmemes reflect an important axiom in tagmemic
 [closest to slot and substitution grammar] theory:
 that meaning cannot be separated from form or
 form from meaning without serious distortion.³¹

Besides a paragraph's functional parts, which reveal it is multisystemic, it has two structural features in the tagmemic approach: "contiguity or concord between the parts, and a system of semantic relationships in which the reader's expectations are aroused and fulfilled" (238). Because these three perspectives are needed for a complete description, looking at only one perspective results in a distorted picture.

There are two patterns offered for the expository paragraph. The first has three functional slots: T (topic), R (restriction), and I (illustration), and these slots can be filled in a variety of ways. A paragraph-level tagmeme is the product of each slot and its filler. [In all Becker's examples the slot filler is a sentence.] The second pattern described has two slots, P (problem) and S (solutions). Basically, there are only these two paragraph patterns, but variations of these two can result in four kinds of operations: deletion, reordering, addition, and combination. The words for the operations are explanatory of how the slots may be altered. Formal paragraph markers, such as graphic markers, lexical markers, and grammatical constraints, are also discussed.

By applying the tagmemic approach, Becker believes the student can partition paragraphs in a consistent and predictable way, because there are shared conventions [TRI, PS] of grouping sentences into higher-level units and there are structural cues which signal these patterns beyond the sentence (242).

Subsequent to the publication of articles already included in this report, College Composition and Communication (May 1966) published a series of articles [one hundred years after Bain's conception of the paragraph was printed] in which five authors commented on articles of their colleagues, along with material on their own paragraph theories and approaches. The presented material was titled "Symposium on the Paragraph." Following are distinctions made by Christensen, Rodgers, Becker, Miles, and Karrfalt. Francis Christensen's presentation comes first in the series.

Christensen proposes "a sequence of structurally related sentences to define the paragraph--without assuming that a paragraph always coincides with or exhausts a sequence."³² And, the sequence of structurally related sentences, "based on the principles of layers of structure of either subordination or coordination, is an identifiable unit" (64). Christensen states his sentence-based analogy of the paragraph came to him after not being able to apply the theoretical constructs [using terms such as analytic and synthetic or deductive and inductive to describe the shapes paragraphs take] on the paragraph or paragraphing. "At this point the sentence analogy occurred to me--it was not Bain sent" (65). So, Christensen suggests that the topic sentence is the one succeeding sentences depend from [suggesting his graphic scheme].

Both Christensen and Becker's paragraph approaches are sentence-based; however, Christensen marked the added distinction that his base is the cumulative sentence. Both writers are concerned with the internal structure of the paragraph. On the following points, Rodgers' approach is dissimilar

to Christensen's and Becker's; he wants to make a clear break with sentence-based theory and does not venture inside the paragraph. Instead, Rodgers focuses on the paragraph from the side of discourse as a whole and is concerned with when and why we indent. But Christensen objects to Rodgers' statement that "paragraphs are not composed," because Christensen states he writes in paragraphs. Rodgers, on the other hand, asserts that writers write, then go back and insert indentions.

In summary, Christensen suggests that the three theorists (Becker, Rodgers, and himself) combine their principles and procedures in order "to guide students into the inductive study [using less rigid constraints than those dictated by deductive principles] of paragraphs and paragraphing; . . . we must consider what appears to be effective" (66).

A. L. Becker has observed that there are three major differences between the approaches of Christensen, Rodgers, and his own: 1) identity and variation of paragraph recognition, 2) formal markers of the paragraphs, 3) formal correspondence of sentence and paragraph structure.

Becker believes most paragraphs are conventional units, not arbitrary, and paragraphs are marked by grammatical, phonological, lexical, and rhetorical features. His approach shows how tagmemic theory can describe certain features of paragraph structure. Here, the factor more important (for Becker) in paragraph structure than the relationship of the sentence is the domain of lexical equivalence chains--a further explanation of what happens in paragraphs.

Christensen says the paragraph has a definable structure and adds [as Becker realizes he should have] that the good paragraph will submit to structural analysis. Christensen's approach shows the structural relations

in paragraphs and finds in actual paragraphs an identity within which many variations are possible. And, Christensen's generative approach does explain the relation of each upcoming sentence to what has come before.

Rodgers creates for himself an insolvable problem by seeking a theory which describes all paragraphs, and he rejects the possibility of formally describing paragraphs. Although Christensen's approach is limited as "the result of basing his theory of the paragraph too closely on an analogy of the sentence" (71), it is useful in the teaching of paragraphing.

Becker summarizes his article with saying that he doesn't believe Christensen's and Rodgers' approaches are "wrong; . . . it's just that their approaches don't tell me everything I want to know about paragraphs--but, then, neither does mine" (72).

The following comments are those of Paul C. Rodgers, Jr. The three writers' theories diverge mainly in respective notions of what the paragraph is. Rodgers finds both Christensen and Becker are working with the "expanded sentence" and that they are talking about discourse, not the paragraph. But, Rodgers is not convinced that either Christensen's analytical theory or Becker's procedure [analyze paragraphs by extending grammatical theories now used for analyzing and describing sentences] proves more effective in describing all paragraphs than did the nineteenth-century theorists. Because of the high level of abstraction, tagmemics holds less promise of extension than does Christensen's analytical system which can be extended to cover other kinds of material than the paragraph. Regarding the topic sentence, all three apparently agree that most topic sentences stand at the beginning of the well-constructed paragraph. Even though "we are all working with similar materials and making similar observations, we

just aren't describing what we see in the same way" (77). [These are the words of Rodgers, but they might well be those of Christensen or Becker.]

Additionally, Josephine Miles submitted what paragraphs do: "paragraphs, like words and sentences, may try to be portmanteau, carrying the event and the fullness of its situation all in one unit; or may try to work step-by-step, devoting one or more wholes to each of the concerns of when, where, why, and how" (81). By this Miles distinguishes various sorts of paragraphs. Her paragraph definition, at first, seems non-limiting: "a paragraph is a group of sentences--any sort of group." Then, Miles makes some observations about "groups." Agreeing with Wendell and Christensen, Miles asserts that a paragraph may be to a sentence what a sentence may be to a word, each may share and focus on the same ways of sharing--for the purpose of locating an assertion in a situation, for arriving at similar sorts of groupings. "Any white spacing, between words and sentences as between paragraphs, may serve to say 'rest for a moment,' by a sense of group-making which is either formal or referential. . . . Sentences like paragraphs can join to share ideas that need blending" (81).

Miles states that what Christensen, Rodgers, and Becker have been saying about paragraphs can be backed up by a simple view of purpose in discursive prose, that writing endeavors to provide situations for its statements.

David H. Karrfalt focuses the comments in his contribution to "The Symposium" on sentence theory first, for there are structural principles he applies to both the sentence and the paragraph, before moving to paragraph analysis. Karrfalt agrees with Christensen that structure of most paragraphs includes structures of subordination or coordination, or both. But, there is more.

Because Christensen's generative rhetoric describes only vertical structure (modification and coordination) some difficulties arise, according to Karrfalt, that would be non-existent if horizontal structure (predication and complementation) also had been considered and described. [The reason for this void may result from Christensen's statement that "the modifier is the essential part of any sentence."] Therefore, Christensen's analysis leaves gaps, sentences of the paragraph which cannot easily be described. Here, Karrfalt proposes using both horizontal and vertical structures to eliminate the difficulty. Karrfalt's purpose in examining essays and identifying the horizontal, as well as vertical, structure is to demonstrate that both are significantly there, and he states that writing students should be made aware of both structures.

Later, in 1966, College Composition and Communication published an article by Leo Rockas, "Further Comments on the Paragraph." Rockas finds fault with presentations in "The Symposium" because his questions were not answered. All the writers, says Rockas, begin from the assumption that "the paragraph" exists. Research provided in the articles proves that sentences are real, but did it prove what paragraphs were? Rockas doesn't believe you need generative grammar or tagmemic theory to show what textbooks already demonstrate, that some paragraphs contain coordination or parallelism, or some subordination.

For the real questions--how do groups of sentences fall into neat units and how do sentences get connected in discourse--several answers were offered, but all seem inconclusive to Rockas. Christensen suggested addition, direction of modification, level of generality, and texture. Becker suggested deletion, reordering, addition, and combination.

By including in Rockas' article a sample of E. B. White's "sophisticated prose," later to become the introduction to The Elements of Style, (sans indentions), Rockas demonstrated that several indentations could be justified, which were not indicated by the author. From this, and the material presented in "The Symposium," Rockas concludes that we should "concentrate on the matter (and manner) students are trying to get down and forget about the schoolmarm typographies, which aren't even consistent with each other."³³

In order to determine whether paragraph theory has moved away from Alexander Bain's principles and has been touched by modern theory, the practices of modern writers on paragraph theory need examination. In their paragraph theories, Winterowd, Christensen, Rodgers, and Becker have gone beyond Bain's conception of the paragraph; Braddock and Stern, on the other hand, have challenged Bain's principles. However, in spite of the recent work on paragraph theory, current textbooks, for the most part, reflect Bain's principles in their paragraph materials and thus seem unaffected by recent paragraph considerations. Following are presentations from selected current college composition textbooks that are representative of modern paragraph theory. These textbooks are widely adopted and the authors well-known. The concepts of topic sentences, paragraphs holding one idea, the relationship of sentences within the paragraphs, and the paragraph as a unit of discourse receive primary attention.

Sheridan Baker, The Complete Stylist and Handbook, Second Edition, 1980, places emphasis on style, unlike Bain. Baker calls the paragraph a

structural unit for building the essay: "with blocks of concrete ideas . . . the paragraph is a single idea."³⁴ The essay is composed of beginning, middle, and end paragraphs, and the middle paragraphs are miniature essays. The thesis [topic sentence] is stated at the end of the beginning paragraph. The beginning paragraph is "a funnel--start the paragraph wide and end it narrow" (55). For coherence and unity of the paragraph, the topic sentence is the key, and if the paragraph seems disjointed, the topic sentence may need to be broadened. The primary ways to gain coherence are to fill in, spell out, and make submerged connections of the material.

Donald Hall, Writing Well, Third Edition, 1979, suggests that the most common paragraph construction begins with the topic sentence, giving the writer and reader "the idea of focus and unity."³⁵ However, the topic sentence may come first, at the end, in the middle to tie together, or be unstated if clearly understood.

The content makes the paragraph. Paragraphs become units of thought and feeling, so "the paragraph becomes a semantic unit and carries meaning" (186). Unity and coherence are thus necessary. For unity, the topic sentence is often a requirement, and "no odd facts [should be included] . . . the paragraph is homogeneous . . . is orderly" (186, 189). Coherence within the paragraph is needed; "the writer must blend information so that it coheres in a meaningful whole" (198). This coherence is aided by connecting the facts in the paragraph through verb tense and pronoun agreement and by using transitions. These directives parallel Bain.

Finding means of development appropriate to the paragraph material depends on the purpose. Effective ordering of material allows sentences to

follow each other with a sense of purpose. The result aimed for is unity, coherence, and clarity, for "a paragraph is a small box of sentences, making a whole shape that is at the same time part of another whole. It is a miniature itself . . ." (185).

The Harbrace College Handbook, Eighth Edition, 1977, by John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten, "attempts to describe the usual good practice of good contemporary writers and to state that practice as simply as possible."³⁶ Hodges and Whitten define the paragraph as "a distinct unit of thought--usually a group of related sentences, though occasionally no more than one sentence--in a written or printed composition" (298), and "a paragraph is usually a series of sentences developing one controlling idea" (321). This controlling idea is most often in the first sentence, the topic sentence, but may appear anywhere. The controlling idea may be restated at the end of the paragraph.

Unity is achieved by making each sentence in the paragraph contribute to the controlling thought. The sentences of the paragraph should interlink so the thought flows smoothly from one sentence to the next. Arrangement of the sentences needs clear and logical order, and transitions between sentences can serve as links. Development of the paragraph should be adequate; however, a paragraph can be of one sentence. The authors, whose presentation reflects concepts of Bain, then go on to offer seven methods of developing paragraph material.

William F. Irmscher states in The Holt Guide to English, 1981, that a paragraph cannot be defined as a grammatical unit because of its variances,

so emphasis must be placed on what a paragraph does; this approach deviates from Bain. However, as the paragraph is a conventional unit of discourse there are certain expectations held by the reader. These expectations require that the paragraph be functional, adequately developed (depends on the purpose), varied in length in relation to other paragraphs, unified (singleness of purpose using unity as a test for relevance), and coherent (sentences are interlocked--including repetition, parallelism).

The topic sentence, declares Irmscher, "is usually a brief general statement of the main point being discussed and can be thought of as the highest level of generality in the paragraph."³⁷ The topic sentence may appear first, last, in the middle of the paragraph, or not at all. Needed in the paragraph are support and illustrations, as the sentences move from generalization to particular. Also, details will help the writer's meaning to be clear. Irmscher offers six "paragraph patterns" for arrangement of sentences in the paragraph: from general to particular, from particular to general, alternating order, time order, space order, climactic order.

No one standard of measurement is applicable to the paragraph, says Irmscher, for the unit may be a logical division, a rhetorical unit, or a visual device; however, "the paragraph represents a relatively short unit of varying length that divides discourse for purposes of readability and better understanding" (93).

James M. McCrimmon, Writing With a Purpose, Seventh Edition, 1980, considers writing as a process and within that process is paragraph construction, for "paragraphing is a means of presenting ideas and information in units of related sentences."³⁸ In expository writing there are

two kinds of paragraphs, topical and special (introductory, concluding, and transition).

The topical paragraph consists of sets of sentences, all dealing with a common topic. First, it has only one topic, and each succeeding sentence must make clear connection to the topic idea. The second requirement is completeness; the paragraph must say all the reader needs to know about the topic. The third says that sentences must follow a reasonable order. The fourth requirement of the topical paragraph is coherence; the paragraph must be written so it can read as a unit, a whole. Evident here are some of Bain's principles.

The topic sentence helps to govern the paragraph's intention, and for the beginning writer it should appear at the beginning. The writer needs clear focus, and irrelevant sentences blur focus and obscure the writer's point.

Strategies of Rhetoric, Third Edition, 1979, by A. M. Tibbetts and Charlene Tibbetts, offers ways for students to organize paragraph writing. The paragraph is defined as "a collection of sentences that helps you fulfill your thesis [theme promise]. Itself a small theme, a paragraph should be clearly written and specific, and it should not wander or make irrelevant remarks."³⁹

The term used by Tibbetts and Tibbetts is the "promise pattern." The "promise" is near the beginning, and the following sentences in the paragraph keep the promise. The "promise" is the paragraph's topic idea. There can be more than one "promise" in a paragraph (91). The don'ts offered are directed, for the most part, to the paragraph holding one idea:

1) avoid fragmentary paragraphs (not developing promise); 2) don't allow any paragraph to be a collection of unrelated statements; 3) avoid irrelevancies in your paragraph (100). [Attention here is, as was for Bain, to unity and coherence of the paragraph.] The arrangement of paragraph material suggests that the writer start with simple and familiar ideas before moving to more complex ones or use a graded order of ideas, moving from "least" important to "most" important material.

The writers of these textbooks can be grouped according to their attention or lack of attention to Bain's paragraph theory. Donald Hall, a disciple of Bain, describes the paragraph as a semantic unit which carries meaning, but the principles of construction of the paragraph are from Bain. The Harbrace College Handbook includes description of good writing practice and gives directions, reflecting Bain's presentation. McCrimmon's Writing With a Purpose focuses on paragraph writing as a process but utilizes some principles of Bain to accomplish the process. The organization of the paragraph provides the direction for Tibbetts and Tibbetts, and "the promise pattern" is another term for writing which develops the topic sentence. And, the restrictions they place on the pattern are the restrictions Bain had included in his principles.

From the non-Bainian approach, Sheridan Baker states that the paragraph is a structural unit and places the topic sentence at the end of the paragraph, at the bottom of the "funnel" as paragraphs are used to build the essay. In The Holt Guide to English, Irmscher states he doesn't believe the paragraph can be defined because of its variances and, instead, would look to its function. The paragraph holds certain expectations for the reader, and the writer must fulfill them. The purposes of the paragraph

are for readability and better understanding. These two authors implement approaches contrary to Bain in their textbooks.

What generalizations then can be made about paragraph theory in modern textbooks? It appears that Bain's influence is still strong, but one cannot tell if contemporary writers of the pedagogy are aware of paragraph theory's origin. Instruction in paragraph writing in the recent past gives various directions based on the definition of the paragraph as structural unit or as semantic unit or as division of discourse or as a non-grammatical unit that cannot be defined. Still, there is a binding goal for all the presentations and analyses, to locate the method or means by which the composition student can write the good paragraph.

A close look at how this goal is being achieved reveals that in the recent composition textbooks examined that more authors incorporate Bain's traditional principles than some of the newer principles of modern theorists. What is the definition we can offer students today? Paul Rodgers suggests that the modern paragraph emerges from Bain's conception of the organic paragraph as "an organic structure distinguished by the qualities of unity, coherence, and emphasis; devoted to the amplification and enforcement of the single idea announced in its topic sentence; composed of sentences organically conceived; and itself participating in the larger organic structure of the discourse."⁴⁰ Rodgers concludes that the deductive frame built more than one hundred years ago continues to hold paragraph rhetoric.

The analyses of the paragraph by Christensen, Rodgers, and Becker of fifteen years ago attempt to say that Bain's theory is not valid for this time, but their work is little reflected in recent textbooks considered

in this report. Attempts have been made, and surely are now being made, to dislodge the prescriptive paragraph tradition coming down from Alexander Bain, but--as the survey of best selling composition texts has shown--it has not yet happened.

NOTES

¹ Frank D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1975); W. Ross Winterowd, Rhetoric, A Synthesis (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1968); Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., "Alexander Bain and the Rise of the Organic Paragraph," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 51 (Dec. 1965), 399-408 and "A Discourse-centered Rhetoric of the Paragraph," College Composition and Communication, 17 (Feb. 1966), 2-11; Ned A. Shearer, "Alexander Bain and the Genesis of Paragraph Theory," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (Dec. 1972), 408-417; Francis Christensen, "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," in Contemporary Rhetoric, ed. W. Ross Winterowd (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1975), pp. 233-254; A. L. Becker, "A Tagmemic Approach to Paragraph Analysis," College Composition and Communication, 16 (Dec. 1965), 237-242; Francis Christensen, A. L. Becker, Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., Josephine Miles, David H. Karrfalt, "Symposium on the Paragraph," College Composition and Communication, 17 (May 1966), 60-87; Richard Braddock, "The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences," in The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, edited by Edward P. J. Corbett and Gary Tate (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 310-323; Arthur A. Stern, "When Is A Paragraph?," College Composition and Communication, 21 (Oct. 1976), 253-257; Leo Rockas, "Further Comments on the Paragraph," College Composition and Communication, 17 (Oct. 1966), 148-151.

² Alexander Bain, English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual (American edition, revised) (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1866), p. 142. (Hereafter referred to as Rhetoric.)

³ Bain, Rhetoric, pp. 142-152. Actually, paragraphing of a sort has existed for centuries. Paragraph marks, the oldest marks of punctuation, date from the Greek scribes. Early marks had disappeared, however, by the mid-sixteenth century, except when kept for decoration. Indentation to signify the paragraph is noted as early as 1482, found in an incanabulum of Knoblochtzer (Edwin H. Lewis, The History of the English Paragraph, Diss. Univ. of Chicago, 1894 [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1894], p. 14) but William Caxton made no such indentations. So, the distinction of the paragraph is ancient, but as Lewis observes, "No English writer before Tyndale (1572) has any sense of the paragraph as a subject of internal arrangement." (Lewis, p. 174.)

⁴ Rodgers, p. 401.

⁵ Bain, Rhetoric, p. 142.

⁶ Lewis, pp. 175, 137.

⁷ Rodgers, "Organic Paragraph," 403.

⁸ Lindley Murray, An English Grammar; Comprehending the Principles and Rules of Language (York: Thomas Williamson & Son, 1808), pp. 396-399.

⁹ Joseph Angus, Handbook of the English Tongue; for the Use of Students and Others (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1861), pp. 401-413.

¹⁰ Alexander Bain, English Composition and Rhetoric (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1887), p. 81.

¹¹ Shearer, 414.

¹² Rodgers, "Organic Paragraph," 403.

¹³ Lewis, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ Barrett Wendell, English Composition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. iiv. Note: Wendell has this to say of "good use": "Good use is the basis of all style" (18). ". . . good use is what gives significance to the words of which all style primarily consists, takes a definite form . . . thus governed by three principles, Unity, Mass, Coherence" (28). Of the paragraph, "very generally, then, I may say that good use appears not to sanction rigid monotony of paragraph. Further than that, nothing" (120). All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁵ Bain, Rhetoric, p. 142.

¹⁶ John F. Genung, Practical Elements of Rhetoric (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1886), p. 193.

¹⁷ John F. Genung, Outlines of Rhetoric (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1895), Preface.

¹⁸ Genung, Elements, pp. 198-208.

¹⁹ Genung, Elements, pp. 194-5.

²⁰ Fred N. Scott and Joseph V. Denney, Paragraph-Writing (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1893), p. iii. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²¹ Charles Sears Baldwin, College Manual of Rhetoric (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), pp. 10-11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²² Albert R. Kitzhaber, Rhetoric in American Colleges 1850-1900, Diss. University of Washington, 1953 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. Microfilm, 1953), p. 242. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²³ D'Angelo, p. 62.

²⁴ Frank J. D'Angelo, Process and Thought in Composition, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 318.

²⁵ W. Ross Winterowd, The Contemporary Writer, A Practical Rhetoric, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1981), p. 113. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²⁶ Christensen, "Generative Rhetoric," 234. Note: The cumulative sentence includes all levels added to the sentence, [base clause of a sentence plus] the added sentence modifiers, clusters, absolutes, and nonrestrictive subordinate and relative clauses.

²⁷ Rodgers, "Discourse-centered Rhetoric," 2.

²⁸ Bain, Rhetoric, p. 108.

²⁹ Braddock, 320-1. All further references to this work are in the text.

³⁰ Stern, 300. All further references to this work are in the text. Note: Some may say Stern's research design was flawed because of the prose examples used.

³¹ Becker, "Tagmemic Approach," 237.

³² "Symposium on the Paragraph," 64. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³³ Rockas, 151.

³⁴ Sheridan Baker, The Complete Stylist and Handbook, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), p. 50. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³⁵ Donald Hall, Writing Well, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1979), p. 192. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³⁶ John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten, Harbrace College Handbook, 8th ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), p. vii.

All further references to this work appear in the text.

³⁷ William F. Irmischer, The Holt Guide to English, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 95. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³⁸ James M. McCrimmon, Writing With a Purpose, 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1980), p. 94.

³⁹ A. M. Tibbetts and Charlene Tibbetts, Strategies of Rhetoric, 3rd ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1979), p. 96. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴⁰ Rodgers, "Organic Paragraph," 151.

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PARAGRAPH THEORY: BAIN AND NOW

by

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B. A., Kansas State University, 1978

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1982

Paragraph theory includes the historical definition of the paragraph; the purpose of the paragraph; the length of the paragraph; the association and relationships of sentences within the paragraph; the appropriateness of the paragraph's sentences as related to the subject of the paragraph; and consideration of the role the paragraph performs in an entire written composition.

Modern presentations of paragraph theory occur in theoretical pieces by Frank D'Angelo, W. Ross Winterowd, Albert R. Kitzhaber, Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., Ned A. Shearer, Francis Christensen, A. L. Becker, Josephine Miles, David H. Karrfalt, Richard Braddock, Arthur A. Stern, Leo Rockas, and in such widely adopted college composition textbooks as Sheridan Baker's The Complete Stylist and Handbook, Donald Hall's Writing Well, William C. Irmischer's The Holt Guide to English, James M. McCrimmon's Writing With A Purpose, and A. M. and Charlene Tibbetts' Strategies of Rhetoric.

This report will attempt to ascertain whether modern paragraph theory has been altered by recent theory or whether it is still dominated by the conception developed by Alexander Bain in his English Composition and Rhetoric, 1866. In that work Bain, a Scottish philosopher and Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Aberdeen, defined the paragraph as "a collection of sentences with unity of purpose which handles and exhausts a distinct topic." Bain gave six rules, or "principles that govern the structure of the paragraph for all kinds of composition":

- I. The first requisite of the paragraph is,
that the bearing of each sentence upon what
precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable.

II. When several consecutive sentences iterate or illustrate the same idea, they should, as far as possible, be formed alike. This may be called the rule of Parallel Construction.

III. The opening sentence, unless so constructed as to be preparatory, is expected to indicate with prominence the subject of the paragraph.

IV. A paragraph should be consecutive, or free from dislocation.

V. The paragraph should possess unity; which implies a definite purpose, and forbids digressions and irrelevant matter.

VI. As in the sentence, so in the paragraph, a due proportion should obtain between principal and subordinate statements.

The conclusion made from this investigation of paragraph theory determines that attempts have been made, and surely are now being made, to dislodge the prescriptive tradition coming down from Alexander Bain, but it has not yet happened.