Organising ideas for writing

We’re going to take a quick look with a ‘delicious’ exercise in organising paragraphs. I don’t pretend this is PhD-busting stuff but the principles can be applied in many situations where you don’t know where to start with writing – be it a blog post or an essay.

Imagine you have never had a lesson on how to organise ideas into paragraphs, except for the ‘beginning-middle-end’ to a written piece. Many people leave with that sound bite and don’t apply it. This exercise can help you understand the subtle interplay between words in one paragraph and words in the next.

* On page 2 there are 8 sentences which make up a short 150-word composition. \**If you have a printer I think you’ll have more fun doing it the old fashioned way. Print off a copy of page 2. Cut out the strips so that you have 8 separate pieces, lettered a-j. Then continue as below.*
* Move the sentence strips around (copy-paste) into the following order (1-8 as below) so that you finish with a kind of 1-e, 2-b etc. response.
* The challenge is to find the topic sentences for each of the 2 paragraphs A and B. Decide which order they come in according to the introduction you choose. They are all inter-related …. and THAT is the key!

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| 1. Introduction
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| 1. Paragraph A – **topic sentence**
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| 1. Paragraph A – supporting sentence 1
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| 1. Paragraph A – supporting sentence 2
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| 1. Paragraph B – **topic sentence**
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| 1. Paragraph B – supporting sentence 1
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| 1. Paragraph B – supporting sentence 2
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| 1. Ending/ Conclusion /Overall summary
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Worksheet 1 strips

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| 1. I miss my favourite dish, which had seafood, noodles and lots of fresh vegetables.
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| 1. Foods like chilies, ginger and garlic really make food taste delicious, and they're good for you too.
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| 1. We didn't need to make plans to see each other; we'd just go to each other's house whenever we felt like it.
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| 1. It's hard for me to be in a country on my own when I'm used to being with family and seeing my friends every day.
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| 1. My family and friends all lived in the same neighbourhood, and we usually saw each other every day.
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| 1. If I could be anywhere else right now, I'd want to be back home in Thailand for several reasons.
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| 1. I'm really happy to be here, but I have moments of homesickness, especially when I have dinner alone.
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| 1. I love healthy, spicy Thai food.
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| Complete the spaces below with the 8 sentences: |
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And bingo – now you have a well-organised composition.

* Did you see how the introduction gave you a ‘hook’, without saying too much?
* Can you spot any words/phrases in the introduction that link to each paragraph? Highlight them to show how they connect to each other as the text moves on.
* Highlight or underline phrases in the conclusion which also connect to the above paragraphs. Hopefully you saw that there is no repetition. Instead, the composition uses *words that convey similar meanings* to keep ideas connected.
* How about finishing it off with a title?

**Need more exercise?**

Try the same with the next page of 8 sentences. These are more similar to the style you write in higher education.

*“Let me know how you did.”*

Worksheet 2

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| 1. In my country, Italy, we have five weeks of vacation, which really gives you a chance to feel like you're away from work. When I get back from vacation, I find I look forward to the challenges at work again.
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| 1. Most Europeans have 4-6 weeks of vacation per year and have high productivity.
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| 1. Spending time with your family and friends is possibly the most important part of life.
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| 1. When people don't have enough vacation, the consequences can be serious. In fact, in Japan there's even a term for dying from overwork: it's 'karoshi'.
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| 1. Vacation is rejuvenating, and actually gives people a lot of energy.
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| 1. People on their deathbeds often regret not having spent enough time with family and friends. They never regret not having spent enough time in the office.
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| 1. Although work is important, it's not the only important part of life.
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| 1. I strongly agree that people need more than two weeks of vacation a year to perform well at work.
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