**Paragraph Structure, Topic Sentences and Transitions**

**Post-Class Activities**

These post-class activities have been designed to give you further practice in spotting paragraphs with a good structure, that feature appropriate topic sentences, and which are bound together by effective transition words and phrases.

**Question 1 (4 marks)**

Below are four paragraphs that all feature **one different** basic error. These errors relate to paragraph structure and/or the logical development of ideas in the piece of writing. Try to match the main problem to the paragraph in which it is present.

**Paragraph 1:** An adult red squirrel weighs approximately 300 g, whereas the much heavier eastern grey squirrel weighs nearer 600 g when mature. Red squirrels are also much smaller in terms of length, measuring approximately 20 cm as opposed to the 30 cm that is typical of a grey squirrel. Grey squirrels tend to be more competitive and bully red squirrels away from suitable habitats when the two species co-exist because of their greater size.

**Paragraph 2:** Competition tends to be more intense between individuals of the same species than between members of different species. The main reason for this is that members of the same species have more similar resource requirements, whereas different species typically evolve to exploit slightly different resources. For example, finches on the Galapagos Islands have evolved different beak sizes so as to make use of a variety of different seed sizes as food resources. Although different bird species will eat more than one type of seed, and thus compete with each other, each one has evolved to specialize in eating one seed type. Thus, when that particular size of seed is very scarce, competition will be higher between members of the same species. Evolution of beak sizes takes a considerable amount of time and occurs constantly over thousands of generations. Natural variation in the beak sizes of individuals leads to certain birds being more competitive than others. Over time, these birds are more likely to pass on their genes to the next generation, which in turn means it is more likely that birds with similar beak sizes will populate each species.

**Paragraph 3:** Children born from the same parents can have very different physical characteristics, such as eye and hair colour, height, and muscle definition. Similarly, fish that hatch from eggs produced and fertilized by the same breeding pair will differ in the shape of their fins and the patterns on their scales. Dogs, too, despite being part of the same litter, will have different body shapes and sizes.

**Paragraph 4:** Complex statistical tests of data are being used increasingly frequently even though people who design the experiments they evaluate rarely understand them. Tests that compare differences in averages seen in different treatment groups are straightforward enough but others, such as Principal Components Analyses, are very complex. Many published journal articles rely on very complicated statistical tests to garner support for the conclusions drawn by the author(s).

**Problem A:** This paragraph is lacking a topic sentence (and transition).

**Problem B:** This paragraph begins with overly specific information before becoming more general.

**Problem C:** This paragraph addresses more than one main point (and has two topic sentences), so the information in it should be split into separate paragraphs.

**Problem D:** No evidence is given to support the claim made in the topic sentence.

**Question 2 (4 marks)**

Read the paragraph about the price of halibut below. You have been provided with three ideas for stylistic ‘alterations’ that you could make to improve the paragraph. Your task is to rank these in order from the one that would make the biggest improvement to the smallest (3 marks).

Once you have done this, cut and paste the original paragraph and put your first choice alteration into practice by editing the paragraph in this way (1 mark). **Bold** any changes you make so that these can easily be seen in your altered version.

*Reporters have been known to make some major errors when writing science articles. For example, a journalist once reported that it was becoming more expensive to eat halibut because toothpaste was also going up in price in North America. He came to this conclusion after noticing a correlation between these two variables. What he had not taken into account was that halibut was becoming more expensive due to sudden shortages that always occurred at that time of year, and that toothpaste just happened to be in temporary short supply due to import delays from China. Unsurprisingly, a few weeks later he realized his error after paying top price for a halibut steak within moments of buying two tubes of toothpaste for next to nothing; supermarkets were selling it cheaply again due to a sudden influx of the product from abroad.*

**Alteration A:** Divide the text into separate paragraphs.

**Alteration B:** Improve the choice of transitional words/phrases.

**Alteration C:** Write a more effective topic sentence.

**Questions 3, 4 and 5 (3 marks each, 9 marks total)**

For each of the following topics, choose the suitable topic sentence and **match** the reasons that make the others unsuitable to the unsuitable topic sentences. In all cases, when choosing your suitable topic sentence, imagine that you are just beginning to write an essay on the topic.

**Question 3 (3 marks)**

**Topic 1: Antibiotic resistance in bacteria.**

**Topic Sentence 1:** One of the main causes of bacteria developing resistance to antibiotics is the over-prescription of drugs.

**Topic Sentence 2:** Bacteria can develop resistance to specific antibiotics for a variety of reasons.

**Topic Sentence 3:** In less than 20 years the percentage of *S. pneumoniae* strains that developed resistance to Penicillin-based drugs rose from 4% to 33%.

**Option A:** Information is too specific for a topic sentence.

**Option B:** The focus is too narrow for the information that will follow about this topic.

**Option C:** Suitable topic sentence.

**Question 4 (3 marks)**

**Topic 2: Plagiarism in science**

**Topic Sentence 1:** Many people believe that plagiarism in science is a simple case of quoting someone else’s published work and passing it off as their own.

**Topic Sentence 2:** What does – and does not – constitute plagiarism in science is a multi-faceted issue that many scholars will debate and debate and still disagree about.

**Topic Sentence 3:** Plagiarism in science is a complex topic and includes many different types of academic fraud.

**Option A:** Too difficult to interpret.

**Option B:** Suitable topic sentence.

**Option C:** Too narrow in focus for the information that should follow about this topic.

**Question 5 (3 marks)**

**Topic 3: Catchy headlines in science articles.**

**Topic Sentence 1:** A recent study suggested members of the general public would be 36% more likely to read a science article if the headline was catchy and non-specific.

**Topic Sentence 2:** Do you think that scientists should write in a more engaging style if it would result in more people reading their articles?

**Topic Sentence 3:** When polling a total of 1135 New York citizens, it was discovered that these people would be 36% more likely to read a science article if the headline was written in a more catchy, accessible style than is typical for such articles.

**Option A:** Suitable topic sentence.

**Option B:** Information is too specific for a topic sentence.

**Option C:** Suitable topic sentence, but there is a catchier, more attention-grabbing option.

**Question 6 (5 marks)**

Read the paragraph below and try to fill in the blanks by using the transitional words/phrases that appear at the end (each transition can only be used once). Cut and paste the paragraph and replace the numbers with your choice of transitional word/phrase.

*The global population is estimated to have doubled in the last 50 years, which has placed an extra strain on the planet’s natural resources and led to governments adopting greener policies and investing in innovative energy technologies.***1 ,***renewable energy sources, such as solar and tidal power have been used to power appliances and homes in parts of Europe.***2** ,*schools in these regions have developed workshops to educate their pupils about the importance of saving energy from an early age.* **3**,*it is hoped kids will learn not to leave lights on when they are not using them,***4** *instead they will instinctively know to switch them off.***5**,  *educational efforts can only go so far in the fight to conserve energy, especially if technological advances are not made to boost output.*

Fill in the blanks by choosing from:

**Option A:** In addition/also

**Option B:** And

**Option C:** However

**Option D:** As a result

**Option E:** For example

**Question 7 (5 marks)**

Copy and paste the paragraph below and replace the numbered gaps with **suitable** transitional words/phrases that make each sentence flow into the next one and aid smooth development of the writing.

*Popular since the 1970s, mood rings are made up of liquid crystals in a glass shell. [1] the mood of the person wearing the ring changes, the colour of the ring will also change (or at least that is what consumers are told). [2], the explanation for the change in colour is a deceptively simple one: [3] temperature changes, the molecular structure of the crystals also changes due to the movement of particles in them. [4] different wavelengths of light are absorbed and reflected, which in turn means we see a change in colour. [5] colour changes regularly in mood rings, there is no evidence to suggest it is closely related to a person's mood.*

**Question 8 (6 marks)**

Combine all the skills you have learned to write a very well structured paragraph. To get you in the habit of editing your work to improve it, revisit the paragraph you wrote for the pre-class activities to complete this task. You should have made a copy of this paragraph when you completed the pre-class activities.

**You** **can add more detail and should change some of the wording to improve your paragraph**, but you must ensure the final piece still has **five different sentences that are separated into two paragraphs**.

Your aim is to improve your work by (**1**) writing more effective topic sentences, (**2**) using more effective transitions to make it flow more smoothly from sentence to sentence, and (**3**) improving the cohesion/ordering of information. To show improvement, you will need to copy and paste your original paragraph (make sure you note which one this is) before writing a new, improved version.

**Note: If you did not make a copy of your original paragraph, you should write a new one (about a science subject that interests you) to attempt this question. It should be 100-200 words in length and feature five sentences separated into two paragraphs.  Please note, however, that to obtain maximum possible credit, you must copy and paste your original paragraph before editing it so that you can show how your skills have improved.**