

## Coherence

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Coherence: maintaining the overall focus of a paragraph on the development of one topic

### **Coherence:**

Readers identify the topics of individual sentences easily. The writer's task is to make those topics come in a connected set, a paragraph. You achieve this by staying focused on the development of one controlling idea.

Consider the following topic sentence:

While unicorns are often described as horses with a horn, they are actually a mix of the horse with at least one other animal.

Topic: unicorns

Controlling idea: unicorns are a combination of horses with some other animal

Now consider the following two paragraphs:

While unicorns are often described as horses with a horn, they are actually a mix of the horse with at least one other animal. Unicorns have the body of a horse combined with the hooves and beard of a goat and a lion's tail. They are not the only mythological creatures to be imagined with body parts from different animals. The gryphon comprises the head, talons and wings of an eagle with the body of a lion. Another well-known creature, the Sphinx, has the body of a lion but the head of a man.

While unicorns are often described as horses with a horn, they are actually a mix of the horse, lion, and billy goat. Unicorns have the body of a horse combined with the hooves and beard of a goat and a lion's tail. While no one knows the exact origin of the unicorn's myth, many believe that each animal symbolizes one of unicorn's characteristics. The horse's body is said to represent agility, the billy goat's feet and beard connote cleverness and a solitary nature, and lion's tail represents strength and power. Regardless of the symbolism, unicorns have always been admired as far more than mere horses with horns.

Does one paragraph seem more coherent than the other? Why?

While both paragraphs relate to the topics brought up in the topic sentence, only one paragraph develops the controlling idea. The second paragraph expands on the idea that the unicorn is a combination of a few animals. The first paragraph, on the other hand, tangents off onto other mythological creatures composed of multiple animals. While that might be an interesting paragraph, it's not the paragraph that was introduced in the topic sentence. So, the second paragraph is coherent, while the first paragraph is not.

