Writing Exercise: Paragraphs

Today I want you to focus on writing some body paragraphs for your essay.

This is just a draft and is not set in stone, but is designed to get you thinking about how to structure your paragraphs and your thoughts.

Before Writing a Paragraph

- Before writing a paragraph, you need to know what you are writing about. Look at your thesis statement, introduction, and outline to determine your paragraph's topic.
- The reasons for your thesis/claim will be the topic of each section of your essay and that you must provide the evidence, warrants, and counterarguments that support your reasons and tie them to your claim.
    - For example, if my thesis is "Given the growing regularity of mass shootings, Auburn University should adopt an open-carry policy allowing licensed students to carry guns in compliance with state and federal laws, as such a policy will deter potential shooters, allow students to actively defend themselves, and make students feel safer," I will need a **section** (one or more paragraphs on a single topic) that supports each **reason**.
- Strong paragraphs are about one main idea or topic, which is (generally) explicitly stated in a **topic sentence**. Strong topic sentences should contain both a **topic** and a **controlling idea**:
    - **The topic** – The main subject matter or idea covered in the paragraph.
    - **The controlling idea** – The idea that focuses the topic by providing direction to the paragraph
    - Example topic sentences (**topic**, <u>controlling idea</u>):
        - An open-carry policy **will deter potential shooters** <u>by increasing the risk of attacking the university</u>.
        - In addition, <u>the knowledge that there are others ready to defend them</u> in an emergency will help Auburn **students feel safer** with the institution of an open-carry policy.
- The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single unified focus/topic. If it begins with one topic, it should not end with another or wander between different ideas.
    - Don't be afraid to break bigger topics up into several paragraphs (creating a section) rather than trying to make them all fit into one overly long and unfocused paragraph
- A paragraph should be **coherent**, meaning the paragraph is easily understandable to a reader and logically and clearly connects ideas and sentences together
    - You can create coherence in your paragraphs by creating **logical bridges** and **verbal bridges**.
        - **Logical bridges**: The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence, each logically following the other, and successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form
        - **Verbal bridges**: Key words/phrases (or synonyms) are repeated in several sentences and transition words/phrases are used to link ideas from different sentences

Writing a Paragraph

1. Write a strong topic sentence that includes a topic (based on a reason that supports your thesis) and a controlling idea.
2. Provide evidence to demonstrate your point. After stating your topic sentence, you need to provide information to prove, illustrate, clarify, and/or exemplify your point.
    a. This could include:
        i. Examples to support your point
        ii. Information to help clarify your reasoning
        iii. Specific evidence (quotations, paraphrases, data, statistics, experiences, research, etc.) that supports my reason
    b. Use transitional or introductory phrases (for example, for instance, etc.) use signal phrases ("John Smith explains"), and cite your sources appropriately
3. Explain and analyze your evidence and make it clear to your reader how that evidence supports your topic sentence.
4. Provide additional supporting evidence as necessary.
    a. Remember that in order to persuade our reader we must provide sufficient and representative evidence that THEY will accept as a bedrock of fact
5. Provide **warrants** for your reasons/evidence. After you have given the reader sufficient evidence to see and understand your point, you need to explain why this information is relevant, meaningful, or interesting, and how it connects your reason to your claim (both at the topic sentence and thesis statement level)
6. Acknowledge and address any (relevant) potential **concessions**, **objections**, **alternatives**, or **counterarguments** to your evidence, reason, or claim
7. After making, supporting, and illustrating your point, add a concluding sentence.
    a. Concluding sentences have two crucial roles in paragraph writing:
        i. They draw together the information you have presented to elaborate your controlling idea by summarizing the point(s) you have made and indicate that conclusions are being drawn.
        ii. They (generally) link the current paragraph to the next paragraph and anticipate the topic sentence of the next through shared diction or ideas.
8. Revise and refine your paragraph to make sure all of the ideas are clear and persuasive and that there is a logical flow to the ideas.
9. Repeat these steps to develop the next paragraph!
10. Make sure there is a logical and coherent flow from one paragraph to the next, building your argument piece by piece.

Note: This is just an exercise to think about how to structure and write a paragraph. Not every paragraph will necessarily include all of these steps (although most will), nor should they always follow this exact same order. This is meant merely as a possible and helpful model, not as a required template.