Reading skills and the discourse of the research article

Today’s class

- Brief conclusions
- Paragraphing in research articles
- Sign up for leading a discussion during the breaks/check workshop schedule
- The introduction section
- In-class practice session analyzing the introduction text

Brief Conclusions

- Found in the final paragraph(s) of RAs
- Summarize the reported research (RR) and its most important novelty and significance claims
  - Often the clearest and most unambiguous language for the claim of novelty and significance

Brief Conclusions in Research Articles

Example of a brief conclusion
Title: Manipulation of lipid bioaccessibility of almond seeds’ influences on postprandial lipemia in healthy human subjects.

In conclusion, the consumption of lipid in the form of whole almond seeds has a beneficial effect on postprandial lipemia compared with the equivalent free lipid. Although previous studies have shown that food structure is an important influence on postprandial metabolism, few studies have linked this effect directly to the integrity of cell walls and the process of bioaccessibility. We have shown that the degree of lipid encapsulation in almond seeds, which is determined by the structure and properties of the cell walls, plays a crucial role in determining postprandial lipemia.

Brief Conclusions and Reading Selectively

- If the abstract seem to indicate an RA of interest, check to see if there is a brief conclusion:
  - to get a clear initial idea about the main RA message
  - to decide whether to read (a section of) the RA
  - to get a sense of what is going on in the field without reading the RA

What is a paragraph?

- Graphically:
  - a group of sentences
    - set off by white space
    - or by an indented first line

Brief Conclusions versus full section conclusions

- The brief conclusions referred to in our class are different from entire sections entitled Conclusions.
  - Such lengthy conclusion are full sections and typically contain detailed analyses, not a brief summary of the main contribution.

What is the communicative purpose of paragraphs?

- To indicate UNITY of topic:
  
  UNITY =
  
  all the sentences in a paragraph refer to
  
  one main topic

What is a topic?

- Topic = What is being discussed
How do writers create a paragraph unity?

- By choice of information and ideas
- Use of language (choice of vocabulary, grammar, order of sentences)

Reader purpose and UNITY

- You can use paragraph unity in a sequence of paragraphs:
  - to understand/figure out
    - what the writers consider the most important main topics of a (sub)section/ the RA as a whole
  - to organize and remember details according to those topics

Writer purpose and UNITY

- Most RA writers use paragraphs to focus on one topic.
- Many RA writers use paragraphs to focus on topics that they consider particularly important.
  - Some are better at it than others.

Reader purpose and UNITY

- You can use paragraph unity to understand/figure out:
  - how the sentences in a paragraph:
    - relate to the main topic
    - relate to each other

Organization of information in paragraphs

- The most common way to organize information in paragraphs in English is general to specific:
  - Top-down organization
Top-down organization of paragraphs

- The first (or sometimes the second) sentence in a paragraph establishes the main topic.
- This sentence is called the topic sentence (TS).

The remaining sentences present more detailed information
- substantiating, explaining, clarifying, illustrating the topic established in the TS
- These sentences are called the supports (Sus).

Using paragraph organization for reading

- Extensively: reading many RAs
- Selectively: reading only (parts of) some RAs

Using Top-down TSs for extensive and selective reading

- A sequence of top-down TSs typically refers to the main topics of interest of an RA.
- The language in TSs:
  - is usually understandable for readers who have not yet read the supports
  - may provide a brief summary of the main message

Using Top-down TSs for extensive and selective reading

- Top-down TSs are thus good for skimming:
  - Reading to get an overview of:
    - the main topics of an RA / RA section
    - and possibly about the main message about those topics

Using PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION FOR READING EXTENSIVELY AND SELECTIVELY
Skimming for an overview

After reading and predicting from the abstract and brief conclusion, read:
- Titles, subtitles
- Headings, subheadings
- (Introductory paragraphs in sections and subsections)
- Top-down topic sentences

The uses of skimming for an overview

- To decide whether or not to read a (part of an) RA
- To locate sections/paragraphs with information of interest
  - while having obtained an overview
- To predict the main topics and emphasis before you read

What do you do if a writer does not seem to use top-down TSs?

- Read a bit further into the paragraph(s) to get a sense of the topic treated/message.
- Jump to the last sentence in the paragraph.

The uses of skimming for an overview

- To prepare to read a difficult RA
- To quickly look through many RAs to gain an overview of the work of the field without detailed reading

How do you know whether paragraphs have top-down TSs?

- Ask:
  - Does the 1st (or 2nd) sentence in paragraphs generally refer to main topics relevant for the RA section?
  - create a sequence of related relevant topics?
- If yes, they are probably top-down TSs.

How do you know whether paragraphs have top-down TSs?

- Become familiar with what topics are common/commonly mentioned in the TSs in the journals in your field.
Examples
TYPES OF TOPIC SENTENCES COMMON IN RAS

**TSs that merely announce the paragraph topic**

*Let me begin with* an illustration from the design of the Prognosis Model for Stand Development.

Effect of the sampling time (direct immersion) in the peak area of each compound *is shown in Fig 2.*

**TSs that announce the topic and refer to previous research**

*Several methods* for the determination of inulin/oligofructose *have been developed* (15, 18, 21).

*Current approaches* to after-the-fact tracing have numerous shortcomings.

**TSs that announce the topic and present an idea about it**

Monitoring data obtained from a suitably randomized section of treated sites *is an essential part of the modelling system.*

*Since* the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is undergoing a process of economic development, *it is a region of particular interest for research into biomass.*

**TSs that announce the topic and indicate a purpose**

*To aid in summarization and interpretation,* locations were grouped into woody competition categories.

*(Purpose in the research)*

*The objectives in this paper are threefold:* to demonstrate the viability of....

*(Purpose in the RA)*

**TSs that announce the topic and state a claim**

*A simple, two-step method has been developed for the determination* of 5 SAIDs.

*This regional study not only provides silvicultural understandings* but ecological *understanding of patterns and dynamics* of pine plantations to midrotation.
1. Re-read the title and the first sentence in each of the graphic paragraphs of “Stress-dependent flow through fractured clay till: a laboratory study.”

2. In groups of 3 or 4, decide whether these paragraph-initial sentences are top-down TSs.

3. If so, underline these top-down TSs and discuss:
   a) what the topical emphasis is in the title and TS sequence
   b) Whether the TSs provide:
      i. a logical sequence of topics
      ii. and/or a summary of the main message

4. If not, read a bit further into the paragraphs until you get a sense of the main topics/message