

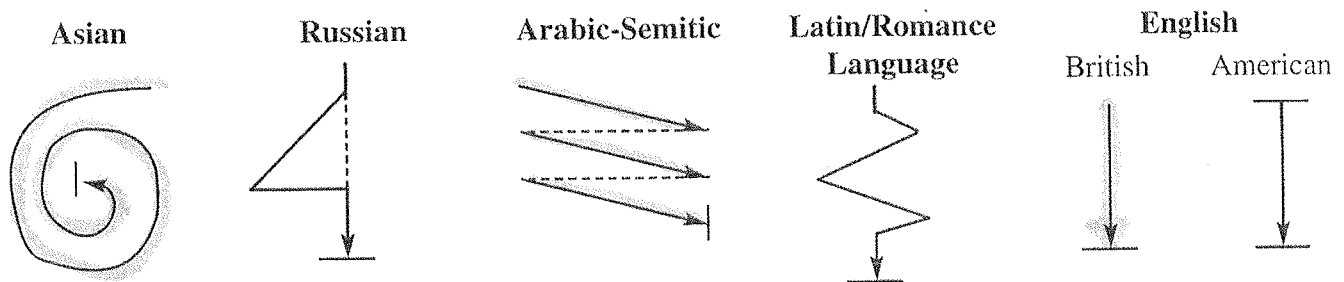
Discourse Patterns

In his article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Discourse," Robert B. Kaplan states, "The teaching of reading and composition to foreign students does differ from the teaching of reading and composition to American students, and cultural differences in the nature of rhetoric supply the key to the difference in teaching approach." (Kaplan 1984, p?)

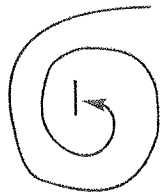
Knowing the differences in rhetoric or patterns of logic among various cultural groups is important for teachers as well as students. Kaplan states that "logic, which is the basis of rhetoric, is evolved out of culture" (Kaplan 1984, 44). He goes on to say, "In the teaching of paragraph structure to foreign students, whether in terms of reading or in terms of composition, the teacher must be himself aware of these differences, and he must make these differences overtly apparent to his students." (Kaplan 1984, 52)

Give the following information on Kaplan's Discourse Patterns in lecture with diagrams. Students will simply take Cornell notes.

These are five examples of culturally specific discourse patterns. These are graphic representations of how different cultures express information in paragraph structure.



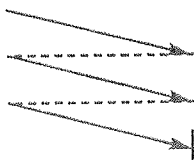
Asian Discourse Pattern



This pattern starts with what seems to be a topic that is far afield or in an apparently unrelated area. The main point is rarely mentioned directly; rather, the topic is revealed often by what it is not—not by what it is. In general, the Asian discourse pattern is indirect, giving the reader or listener clues and perspective on the topic from several points of view. Most importantly, this way of thinking places the topic in a larger global context, showing that the topic connects to and is related to other ideas or things in the world. This indirect route of giving information contrasts in a way almost opposite to the English direct method of expressing information. To the native English speaker, this pattern of logic may seem off topic or "talking in circles."

An example given by Kaplan is a Korean student's paragraph on the importance of education. In only five sentences, it is noted that civilization rests on education, along with the thought that animals are not educated. The Korean paragraph, then, mentions the big picture, i.e., "civilization, and what is not educated: animals," a global view with negative comparison.

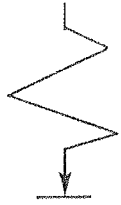
Arab-Semitic Pattern



This pattern uses parallels and comparison/contrast to illustrate or communicate an idea. One sentence may make comparisons such as "Riding a bike is hard, and getting an education is hard." The tendency for very long sentences also occurs in this pattern, as well. Example: "I didn't want to study, so my cousin said he would buy me a bicycle if I studied, so I studied eight hours instead of two each day, so in the end I got a bicycle." The use of conjunctions, in this case the word *so*, is common in this pattern. English structure allows some of this connecting but not as much as the Arab-Semitic.

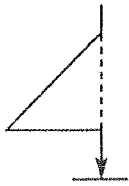
Also, the importance of each main clause is nearly equal, like chain links between the conjunction *so*. Thus, the clauses are parallel in their importance, as seen in this diagram. In both meaning and structure as well, parallels are found. To the English speaker this may seem elementary or even archaic, but the structures are complex. English structurally limits this kind of paralleling.

Latin or Romance Language Pattern



Latin and Romance languages create and allow digressions and flowery symbolic and metaphoric structures. Whereas English is more “clean and direct,” Latin is flamboyant and illustrative. The English ear may think too much is off topic or unrelated to the topic. Yet, again perhaps more like the Asian pattern, “outside” information and short imagistic anecdotes add meaning to the overall text. Extensive use of flowery, modified sentences exemplify this pattern. Like the Arab-Semitic, long sentences also identify this pattern. English ears may get frustrated with the visual nature and meandering tendency of this form of discourse. Overall length is also often an identifying element of the Romance logic pattern: A recent speech by a Mexican political candidate lasted three and a half hours. Latin includes French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Portuguese.

Russian Language Pattern



Russian has a pattern somewhat similar to Latin: digressive, long sentences with the use of metaphor. One example Russian paragraph contained only three sentences. The first two were relatively short and directly related to the topic. The third sentence was four times longer than the previous two sentences and contained much seemingly unrelated information—information only marginally connected to the topic. However, at the end, the main topic was rejoined.

These patterns of thinking exist in members of these cultures who are English dominant; even though they may have English fluency and rarely if ever speak in the native language of their cultures, the thought patterns remain.

English Language Patterns



English, both British and American, tends to be linear and sequential. **American** paragraphs have an almost simplistic overall structure. In the beginning of the paragraph the topic and opinion is placed. Then, the body of the paragraph illustrates or explains directly the aforementioned topic. Finally, the end restates the main idea mentioned in the beginning. Thus, the American discourse pattern is linear, sequential, direct, and what is also referred to as “confrontative”—not confrontational; rather, the logic of this pattern confronts you directly with the information. Often this simple and direct approach is misinterpreted by other cultures as brash or impolite. However, this is not the case most of the time; it is simply the American way of explaining information. It is economical—the sentences tend to be shorter than all the other patterns and the language less modified by adjectives.

The **British** variation is linear as well but not as direct. British essays reflect a less direct and more implied meaning. In addition, the main point or thesis is often located at the end of the paragraph, unlike the American pattern, which has the topic in the beginning as well as the end, where there is a restatement of the thesis or topic.



As noted earlier, as you teach these discourse patterns it becomes apparent that there are several styles or types of logical arrangements for paragraphs, depending on the cultural influence. Also, and most importantly, the American discourse pattern becomes more understandable when it is contrasted with these other models. Knowing their patterns also aids you, the teacher, as you scaffold the American paragraph to your students of various cultural backgrounds.