Powerful Paragraphs

What is a “Powerful Paragraph”?
A powerful paragraph is entirely relevant to your thesis, fully-developed, and coherent.

Relevant to your Thesis
The thesis statement is the main point that your essay will prove or support. Therefore, every sentence in your paper must help prove or support your thesis in some way. The following paragraph has a topic sentence that clearly relates to the thesis, but some sentences after it do not. Can you find them?

Thesis: Mastery experience is the best way to build self-esteem.

Paragraph: Mastery experience is the positive feeling one gets from successfully accomplishing a task. Hearing praise is important. It feels good to have success, and it also makes one confident about one’s abilities to do other things successfully. For example, getting good grades can boost self-esteem. My teachers have always been really nice. Therefore, setting challenges for oneself is important. Mastery experience effectively builds self-esteem.

Which sentences do not relate to the thesis statement?

Fully-developed
To fully develop a paragraph, make sure it has each of the following things:

- **Point**
  - Make a **point**, or claim, that relates to your thesis. This point should be found in your paragraph’s **topic sentence**.
- **Evidence**
  - Give examples and other evidence that help prove your **point**
- **Explanation**
  - Explain why your examples and other evidence prove your **point**

Thesis: Mastery experience is the best way to build self-esteem.

**Point/Topic Sentence:** Mastery experience is the positive feeling one gets from successfully accomplishing a task.

**Evidence:** For example, getting good grades can boost self-esteem.

**Explanation:** It feels good to have success, and it also makes one confident about one’s abilities to do other things successfully. Therefore, Mastery experience effectively builds self-esteem.

Notice that the **Point** is stated at the beginning of the paragraph, supported in the middle of the paragraph, and then restated at the end of the paragraph.
Coherence

Coherence means that your ideas are clearly connected. Teachers often refer to coherence as “flow.” Coherence, or flow, results from effective transitions and “coherence ties.”

Transitions

- Good transitions make explicit connections between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs

Coherence Ties

- “Coherence Ties” create implicit connections (implied, understood connections) between ideas

In the example below, the transitions have been underlined and the “coherence ties” have been bolded:

Mastery experience is the positive feeling one gets from successfully accomplishing a task. For example, getting good grades can boost self-esteem. It feels good to have success, and it also makes one confident about one’s abilities to do other things successfully. Therefore, mastery experience effectively builds self-esteem.

Notice how many words are bolded! These “coherence ties” create implicit, understood connections throughout the paragraph. Take a closer look at them, so that you can use similar “coherence ties” in your writing.

- **Synonyms and Similar Ideas**
  - positive feeling, self-esteem, feels good, makes one confident
  - accomplishing a task, getting good grades

- **Direct Repetition**
  - Mastery experience, self-esteem

The transitions, in contrast, create explicit, easily seen connections between ideas.

- **For example** signals to the reader that an example is coming up.
- **Therefore** tells the reader that the next idea is a result of the previous idea.