

# Paragraph structure: the three parts of a paragraph



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1. Topic Sentence: States the main idea of the paragraph. It limits the topic to one specific area that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph. It has two parts:

a) Topic

b) Controlling idea. e. g.

Driving on freeways requires skills and alertness. Topic controlling idea

Registering for college classes can be a frustrating experience for new

students. Topic controlling idea Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two

important characteristics. Topic controlling idea.

2. Supporting Sentences: develop the topic sentence. They explain or prove the topic sentence by giving more information about it. e. g. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. For example, a Macedonian coin remains untarnished today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago.

3. Concluding Sentence: signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember. e. g.

In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

## **How to Write Good Topic Sentences**

1. It must be a complete sentence.

2. It must contain both the topic and the controlling idea.

3. A topic sentence is the most general sentence in the paragraph because it gives only the main idea. It doesn't give specific details. A reader wants to

know generally what to expect in a paragraph, but they don't want to learn all the details in the first sentence.

- a) A lunar eclipse is an omen of a coming disaster. \_\_\_\_\_ too specific. \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Superstitions have been around forever. \_\_\_\_\_ too general \_\_\_\_\_
- c) People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon. \_\_\_ best TS \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Is made of green cheese. \_\_\_\_\_ incomplete \_\_\_\_\_

Now, it's your turn:

1.

- a) The history of astronomy is interesting. \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Ice age people recorded the appearance of new moons by making scratches \_\_\_\_\_ in animal bones.
- c) For example, Stonehenge in Britain, built 3500 years ago to track the \_\_\_\_\_ movements of the sun.
- d) Ancient people observed and recorded lunar and solar events in different \_\_\_\_\_ ways.

2.

- a) It is hard to know which foods are safe to eat nowadays. \_\_\_\_\_
- b) In some large ocean fish, there are high levels of mercury. \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Undercooked chickens and hamburger may carry E. coli bacteria. \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Not to mention mad cow disease. \_\_\_\_\_

e) Foodsafety is an important issue. \_\_\_\_\_

Writing topic sentences:

Read the paragraphs below.

The topic sentence of each paragraph has been omitted. Try to write a suitable topic sentence for each paragraph.

\_\_\_\_\_. In Beijing, China, people own over 7 million bicycles. In cities in Denmark, between 20 and 30 percent of daily trips are made on bicycles. In many Asian cities, bicycle-like vehicles called rickshaws carry between 10 and 20 percent of the goods moved daily. In Africa, the bicycle is the most common means of traveling intermediate distances. In Iran, too, bicycles are the primary means of transportation in such cities as Yazd and Kerman. \_\_\_\_\_.

The earliest known examples of wheels are from Mesopotamia. It dates from about 3500 to 3000 BC. Wheels were first used in the cart or wagon, pulled by humans or animals. After the invention of the steam engine, wheels were driven by steam. Today, animal-drawn carts are still used in many countries. The horse-drawn chariot appeared in Mesopotamia around 2000 BC. It was later used in Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and other ancient civilizations.

\_\_\_\_\_. Water is often drawn from rivers, lakes, or the ocean for use in factories and power plants. This water is usually returned to the source warmer than when it was taken. This small temperature change in the body of water can drive away from the fish and other animals that were originally present. It attracts other animals in place of them. The result may be fish and other wildlife deaths.

\_\_\_\_\_. The United Nations (UN) estimates that

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the world population reached 6 billion in 1999, and is increasing by more than 77 million persons each year. The rate of increase, 1.3 percent per year, has fallen below the peak rate of 2 percent per year attained by 1970. By the late 2040s, the UN estimates, the growth rate will have fallen to about 0.64 percent annually. At that time more than 50 countries will experience negative growth. \_\_\_\_\_ . The world's heaviest rainfall is about 10,922 mm per year. It occurs in northeastern India. As much as 26,466 mm, or 26 m, of rain have fallen there in one year. Other extreme rainfall records include nearly 1168 mm of rain in one day during a typhoon in the Philippines; 304.8 mm within one hour during a thunderstorm in Missouri; and 62.7 mm in over a 5-min period in Panama.

## **How to Write Supporting Sentences**

The biggest problem in student writing is that student writers often fail to support their ideas adequately. They need to use specific details to be thorough and convincing. There are several kinds of specific supporting details: examples, statistics, and quotations. Sample paragraph:

## **How to Write Concluding Sentences**

A concluding sentence serves two purposes:

1. It signals the end of the paragraph.
2. It leaves the reader with the most important ideas to remember. It can do this in two ways:
  - a) By summarizing the main points of the paragraph.
  - b) By repeating the topic sentence in different ways.

You may start your concluding sentence with one of those signals:

End-of-paragraph signals followed by a comma	End-of-paragraph signals not followed by a comma
Finally, Lastly, In brief, Therefore, Thus, Indeed, To sum up. In conclusion, In short,	The evidence suggests that.... There can be no doubt that ...These examples show that ... see that ....

Now it's your turn.

Write concluding sentences for the following paragraphs:

Read the two paragraphs below and answer the questions that follow each paragraph:

#### Paragraph 1

To be able to make good coffee, you should be aware of some delicate points. First, it is very important to make sure that the pot in which you want to make coffee is clean. Dust can make your coffee bad. Second, pour some clean water into the pot, and let it boil. When the water boils, remove the pot from the stove and let it remain still for a few seconds. Next, pour some instant coffee into a cup and fill the cup with water from the pot. The Lavazza brand is the best instant coffee on the market. What is the topic sentence of the paragraph? What are the controlling ideas in the topic sentence? Circle them. Are all the supporting sentences related to the topic sentence? Are any of the sentences indirectly related to the topic sentence? Are there any sentences that do not belong?

## Paragraph 2

An ideal husband has several characteristics. First, he must be gentle. Second, he must come from a respectable family. Moreover, he must be an honest man who always tells the truth and never cheats his wife. Loyalty is another important point in an ideal husband. Finally, he must be in an acceptable financial situation. All girls like to live in their husbands' personal house, go to work in their husbands' personal car, and have fun with their husbands' money. What is the topic sentence of the second paragraph? What are the controlling ideas in the topic sentence?

Circle them. Are all the supporting sentences related to the topic sentence? Are any of the sentences indirectly related to the topic sentence? Are there any sentences that don't belong? Why don't they fit?

## The Outline

The outline gives you a general plan for your paragraph. It will tell you what points you should include in your paragraph. There are two types of outlines: topic outline, and sentence outline. In topic outlines, you use phrases after each head number. In sentence outlines, however, you use complete sentences after each head number.

The outline below—the plays of Shakespeare—is a topic outline. As you can see, only words or phrases have been used in this outline. Notice that in writing courses, topic outlines are often preferred over sentence outlines. Developing the skill of outlining is a good help for any beginner. Outlining can give you a general plan, a platform, an emblem, or a blueprint. You can then use your outline to give the organization to your paragraphs. Suppose

that you are asked to write about Shakespeare. Shakespeare will be the subject of your writing.

Now, it is for you to decide what to write about Shakespeare. You may decide to write about the plays of Shakespeare. This will be the topic of your paragraph. You should then narrow this topic by a number of controlling ideas. Suppose that you decide to write about three types of Shakespeare's plays. You have limited your topic in terms of number and type.

Now you can make the following outline: The plays of Shakespeare

### I. Tragedies

A. Macbeth

B. Othello

### II. Comedies

A. The comedy of errors

B. The merchant of Venice

### III. Histories

A. Richard II

B. Henry V

This outline can then be expanded into the following paragraph: The plays of Shakespeare can be classified into three types. First, there are tragedies. Two of his most famous tragedies are Macbeth and Othello. Shakespeare has also written a number of comedies. Shakespeare's most outstanding comedies are The comedy of errors and The merchant of Venice. Moreover,



some of Shakespeare's plays focus on history. Richard II and Henry V belong in this category.

### **Exercise**

1. Read the following paragraph carefully, and:

1. Underline the topic.
2. Circle the controlling ideas.
3. Write an outline for the paragraph.

Forests may be divided into the following six general types. First, there are the forests of the hot areas. The famous subtypes are the forests of the northern hemisphere and the oceanic forests. Second, monsoon forests are characteristic of Bengal, Myanmar, Southeast Asia, and India. Tropical forests, on the other hand, are found in regions such as the Campos of Brazil. The next category—Northern pine forests—form a worldwide belt around the earth. Next, rain forests are characteristic of central Africa and the Amazon. Finally, evergreen forests are found in North America and the Caribbean islands.

2. Write a unified paragraph on the basis of the information you get from the following outline.

Types of trees

I. Fruit trees

A. Fleshy fruits 1. Orange 2. Apple

B. Dry fruits 1. Nuts 2. Almond

II. Fruitless trees

A. Pine

B. Oak

## **Steps of Writing a Good Paragraph**

On the whole, there are eight steps for writing a good paragraph. 1. Think about the subject carefully. Example: Air pollution

2. Narrow the subject to a few topics. Example:

- Causes of airpollution
- Effects of air pollution
- Air pollution and theenvironment
- Air pollution versuswater pollution
- The history of air pollution
- Air pollution andglobal warming

3. Choose one of the topics. Make sure you know about what you write. Also, make sure the topic will be of interest to the readers. Example: effects of Air pollution

4. List some details about your topic. Example:

- Effects of air pollution on animal life
- Effects of air pollution on plant life
- Effects of air pollution on humanhealth
- Effects of air pollution on the atmosphere

5. Choose the most important detail you want to communicate. It should be interesting or important to the readers too.

Example: The effects of air pollution on human health

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6. Write a topic sentence based on this detail. Include a few controlling ideas in the topic sentence to limit the size of your paragraph.

Example: Air pollution has two major effects on human health.

7. Make an outline for the paragraph. Effects of air pollution on human health

I. Physical effects A. Heart attack B. Lung cancer

II. Psychological effects A. Depression B. irritation

8. Write your paragraph, using the information you have listed in the outline.

### **Exercise**

1. Choose one of the following subjects: coin airplane shark sea.
2. Follow the eight steps of paragraph writing and develop a paragraph.

Then read your own paragraph and try to answer these questions:

1. Is my paragraph unified?
2. Is it complete?
3. Which sentence is the most general?
4. Which sentences provide specific details to support the topic sentence?
5. Are any sentences unrelated to the topic sentence?
6. Is my paragraph sketchy?
7. What are the controlling ideas of my topic sentence?
8. Is my paragraph interesting?
9. Are my supporting sentences related to my topic sentence?
10. Is there any irrelevant supporting sentence in my paragraph?