

Writing a Strong Paragraph

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Learning Goal and Objectives

Goal

To learn how to write a strong paragraph

Objectives

- 1- Recognize and produce strong topic sentences
- 2- Recognize and produce supporting sentences
- 3- Recognize and produce concluding sentences

What Is a Paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop a main thought, or idea, about a single topic. The structure of a paragraph has usually three basic elements:

(1) a topic sentence,

(2) supporting sentences (details)

(3) a concluding sentence.

Section 1

The Topic Sentence

What Is a Topic Sentence?

- The topic sentence introduces a paragraph.
- It states the main or **controlling idea** of a paragraph.
- It is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph.

The Jobs of a Topic Sentence

A topic sentence has several important jobs:

- introduces the main idea,
- limits or focuses the topic,
- often tells the reader how the information will be organized in the paragraph.

Features of a Topic Sentence

1. It is not a fact.

For example, “**Libraries have books**” is not a good topic sentence. The information in this sentence is true, but it is a fact and there is little to say about it.

Features of a Topic Sentence

2. It is specific.

“**Tea is delicious**” is not a good topic sentence because the information in the sentence is too general. If you want to write a paragraph about tea, make your topic sentence more specific, such as “**Green tea has many health benefits.**”

Features of a Topic Sentence

3. It is not *too specific*.

“This dictionary contains more than 42,000 words” limits the topic too much. There is nothing else for the writer to say, so the paragraph cannot continue.

Features of a Topic Sentence

4- It has two parts:

- **a topic** (what the paragraph is about) and

- **a main or controlling idea** (the direction the paragraph will take).

The controlling idea limits the topic and guides the flow of the paragraph. The controlling idea tells the reader what will be said about the topic.

A topic and a main or controlling idea

Example 1:

- **Soccer** is **popular for many reasons.**

Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why soccer is popular.

A topic and a main or controlling idea

Example 2:

- Many **language students** prefer **bilingual dictionaries** to **monolingual dictionaries.**

Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why this statement is true.

A topic and a main or controlling idea

- 1- Cats are very good pets** *for several reasons.*
- 2- Our school's dress code policy** *has many negative consequences for girls.*
- 3- The world population is strongly impacted** *by a lack of access to water.*
- 4- There are many possible contributing factors** to **global warming.**
- 5- One way to reduce teen pregnancy** *is improved education.*
- 6- Grand Bassam is a wonderful place to visit** *for several.*

SECTION 1 - PRACTICE

**Do exercises 1, 2 and 3 on
the worksheet.**

(5 minutes)

Section 2

Supporting Sentences

What is a Supporting Sentence?

- gives information that explains and expands the topic of the paragraph.
- answers questions — *who? what? where? when? why? and how?*— and give details.
- Good writers think of these questions when they write supporting sentences for the topic sentence.

The Jobs of a Supporting Sentence

1 - explain: The family moved from the village to the capital for economic reasons.

2 - describe: She lived in a lovely three-story castle surrounded by a forest.

The Jobs of a Supporting Sentence

3 - give reasons: Lukas finally quit his job because of the stressful working conditions.

4 - give facts: More than ten percent of the university's student population is international.

The Jobs of a Supporting Sentence

5 - give examples: Oranges and grapefruits grow in California.

6 - define: Many tourists visit Bangkok, which is the capital and largest city in Thailand.

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SECTION 2 - PRACTICE

**Do exercises 4, 5 and 6 on
the worksheet.**

(10 minutes)

Section 3

Concluding Sentences

What is a Concluding Sentence?

- the last sentence of the paragraph.
- concludes or wraps up a paragraph.
- lets the reader know that you have finished talking about the idea introduced by the topic sentence.

The Jobs of a Concluding Sentence

Four important purposes:

- 1- restates the main idea
- 2- offers a suggestion
- 3- gives an opinion
- 4- makes a prediction

It restates the main idea

Perhaps the easiest
concluding sentence to
write is one that simply
restates the main idea or
summarizes the main
points of the paragraph.

It restates the main idea

The following **transitional words** and **phrases** are commonly used **at the beginning of a concluding sentence**:

- **as a result** **overall** **for this reason**
- **certainly** **because of this** **surely**
- **in conclusion** **therefore** **for these reasons**
- **clearly** **thus** **in brief**

It restates the main idea : Example 1

• Topic Sentence:

At some point, most parents have to decide whether or not to allow their children to have pets.

• Concluding Sentence:

In brief, although many children want a pet, parents are divided on this issue for a number of important reasons.

Explanation: The information in this concluding sentence is very similar to the topic sentence. In addition, the concluding sentence includes the phrase “a number of important reasons” because the paragraph includes several reasons for allowing or not allowing children to have pets

It restates the main idea : example 2

Topic Sentence:

eBook readers are excellent devices for students.

Concluding Sentence:

It is clear that eBook readers have made students' lives much easier.

Explanation: This concluding sentence also restates the idea of the topic sentence. The examples in the paragraph show how eBook readers simplify students' lives, and the concluding sentence emphasizes this fact.

It offers a suggestion, gives an opinion, or makes a prediction

A concluding statement can offer a suggestion, give an opinion, or make a prediction. Sometimes a concluding statement does a combination of these three options.

It offers a suggestion, gives an opinion, or makes a prediction : Example 1

Topic Sentence:

Snorkeling can be one of the most amazing adventures you can ever take part in.

Concluding Sentence:

If you want to have one of the most beautiful experiences that anyone can ever have, you should try snorkeling for a day.

Explanation: This topic sentence introduces snorkeling as an amazing adventure, and the concluding sentence offers a suggestion that the reader should try snorkeling.

It offers a suggestion, gives an opinion, or makes a prediction : Example 2

Topic Sentence:

Fortunately, my parents were very strict with me when I was a child.

Concluding Sentence:

Looking back, I am not sorry that my parents were strict with me because I think it was the best way to bring up a child.

Explanation: This topic sentence explains that the writer's parents were very strict. In the concluding sentence, the writer gives his opinion that being a strict parent is the best way to raise a child.

It offers a suggestion, gives an opinion, or makes a prediction : Example 3

Topic Sentence:

The menu at Fresh Market, one of the newest restaurants in downtown Springfield, consists of only five main dishes that are simple but very delicious.

Concluding Sentence:

If you eat a meal at Fresh Market, I am sure you will enjoy it tremendously.

Explanation: This topic sentence informs us that the menu at Fresh Market has only five dishes and they are very delicious. The concluding sentence makes a prediction that you will enjoy this place very much if you eat there.

It offers a suggestion, gives an opinion, or makes a prediction

Topic Sentence

I have a dream to visit Alaska.

My back porch is my favorite place to relax.

I work in one of the world's tallest buildings—Taipei 101.

Concluding Sentence

I hope to visit this wonderful state soon.

I can relax in many places, but my back porch is the best.

I am proud to work in such an important place.

Concluding Sentences : DO's

A few DO's

- Restate the topic sentence using synonyms.
- Restate the topic sentence using a different kind of sentence.
- Wrap up your paragraph.
- Consider using transition words to signify the end of your paragraph.

Concluding Sentences : DON'T's

A few DON'T's

- Copy the exact wording of the topic sentence.
- Include a new topic.
- Focus on a small idea.
- Start the sentence with, And now you know.. That is the reason... That's what I learned about... or And that's why...

SECTION 3 - PRACTICE

Do exercises 7 and 8 on the worksheet.

(15 minutes)

Paragraph Writing: Topic Sentence, Controlling Idea, Supporting Details and Concluding Exercises Selected and reorganized

by

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Exercise 1

Read the paragraph below and answer the following questions

Reasons for Exercise

(1) There are many excellent reasons for exercising several times each week. First, people who exercise look better. (2) Exercise is important to keep our bodies **in good shape**. (3) In addition, people who exercise have more energy. (4) For example, a person who exercises can walk up stairs or **climb** hills more easily. (5) People who exercise have a healthier heart, too. (6) Finally, exercise **reduces** stress and helps you have a clear mind. (7) Too much stress can cause you to worry a lot, and that is not good for your health. (8) For these reasons, if you want to **improve** your health, you should exercise regularly.

Answer these questions:

1. Write the topic sentence
2. Underline the controlling idea(s) in that topic sentence.
3. How is the controlling idea connected to the information in the paragraph?
4. Can you name three benefits of exercising several times each week?

Exercise 2

Read the 5 paragraphs below. Choose and write the best topic sentence for each paragraph on the line provided.

1. _____ . Firstly, living in a foreign country helps you learn another language faster than studying it at school. Secondly, you can learn directly about the history, geography, and culture of a country. Thirdly, you become a more tolerant person because you experience different ways of living. The last, living in a foreign country makes you appreciate your own country better.

- A. You can learn by living in a foreign country.
- B. We should live in a foreign country for a while.
- C. Some benefits you can get by living in a foreign country.

2. _____ . There are some private colleges and universities in the United States. Private colleges and universities are usually more expensive because they do not get money from taxes. Meanwhile, some other colleges and universities are public. It means the citizens of each state pay some of the costs through their taxes so that public colleges are cheaper for students to attend. However, you can get a good education no matter which type of college you attend – public or private.

- A. Two main types of colleges and universities in the United States are private and public.
- B. Private colleges and universities get money from taxes.
- C. There are only some colleges and universities in the United States.

3. _____ . First, the classes in small college are small. There are approximately twenty students in average class in a small college. Second, it is easy to meet with professors. Almost all professors in small colleges have time to help students and are usually happy to do so. Third, small colleges are friendly, so new students make friends quickly. Thus, small colleges are better than large universities for many students.

- A. Small colleges are friendlier than large universities.
- B. Some reasons are stated for attending a small college instead of a large university.
- C. An excellent education you can get at a small college.

4. _____ . One reason is that employers want workers to be dependable. They certainly want workers who come to work every day. The other reason is employers want workers who are responsible. The employers would like to give the worker a project to do and know that it will be done well. In addition, employers look for workers who can work well with others. The ability to get along with co-workers is important to the success of business. In short, employers look for dependable and responsible team players.

- A. It is difficult to find good employers these days.
- B. Employers read job applications very carefully.
- C. The three main qualities the employers look for in their employees.

5. _____ . Green curry is the hottest Thai curry. People who will enjoy green curry are those who like very spicy food. Red curry is medium hot. It doesn't burn your mouth and is flavorful. Yellow curry is the mildest of all. This curry is usually the choice of people who eat Thai food for the first time. To summarize, you have three delicious choices when you order Thai curry.

- A. Thai curry has three different colors.
- B. The meaning of different colors in Thai curry.
- C. Different colors have different meaning in Thai food.

Exercise 3

The topic is in bold and underlined in each of the following topic sentence. Underline the controlling idea. What information do you expect to find in the paragraph? Share your answers with a partner, and then with the class.

1. **The new test** has three sections dealing with three important skills.

Expectation:

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.....
.....

2. The shocking **crash of the airplane** off the coast of Florida confused investigators.

Expectation:

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3. **Crossword puzzles** are not only educational and fun, but also addictive.

Expectation:

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4. Recent research has shown once again that eating dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage may reduce the risk of some types of cancer.

Expectation:

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.....

5. Although buying a house may seem like a good idea, renting an apartment has many advantages.

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Exercise 4

Read each topic sentence. Circle the main idea. Underline the controlling idea. Then predict the kind of information you will find in the paragraph.

1. New York and Boston attract millions of tourists, but I think one of the best cities to visit on the east coast of the United States is Washington, D.C.

What kind of information do you think is in this paragraph?

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.....
.....

2. One of the people that I most admire is my great-grandmother Carla.

What kind of information do you think is in this paragraph?

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.....
.....

3. The Grand Palace is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Thailand.

What kind of information do you think is in this paragraph?

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.....

Exercise 5

Read each group of sentences. One of them is a topic sentence, and the other two provide supporting details. Circle the letters of the sentences that provide supporting details.

1. **TOPIC:** gardening
 - A. Many people enjoy flowers.
 - B. Gardening is a fun and healthy pastime.
 - C. Gardening is a form of mild exercise.

2. **TOPIC:** homework
 - A. There are many different opinions about homework.
 - B. Some people believe homework is unnecessary.
 - C. Others believe that homework is important.

3. **TOPIC:** dogs
 - A. Some breeds are best suited for athletic people.
 - B. Some breeds are “lap dogs” and suited for a quiet life.
 - C. There is a perfect breed of dog for everyone.

4. **TOPIC:** novels
 - A. You learn to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.
 - B. Reading novels can help you develop important life skills.
 - C. Reading novels is an opportunity to practice critical thinking.

5. **TOPIC:** weather
 - A. This summer we have enjoyed wonderful weather.
 - B. Temperatures have averaged 85 degrees.
 - C. We have hardly had any rain.

6. **TOPIC:** Pokémon
 - A. Pokémon is popular around the globe.
 - B. There are Pokémon
 - C. Pokémon products are available in many languages.

Exercise 6

Read the two topic sentences below. Then read the list of supporting sentences. Match each supporting sentence with the corresponding topic sentence by writing the correct topic sentence number on the line beside the supporting sentences. Notice that each sentence is labeled in parentheses with the kind of supporting sentence that it is.

Topic sentences

TS 1: Low-fat diets are an excellent way to stay healthy and trim.

TS 2: High-protein diets are favored by athletes and competitors.

Supporting sentences

- a. These foods help build muscles and increase energy. (fact)
- b. They are preferred by the general public because they help with weight reduction. (reason)
- c. Low-fat diets are recommended by most physicians. (fact)
- d. Many athletes eat high-protein foods, such as meat, beans, and nuts. (example)
- e. Low-fat foods include fruits, vegetables, and pasta. (example)
- f. Because they are easy to find in stores, low-fat foods are convenient. (reason)
- g. Athletes generally eat high-protein diets to give them more energy. (reason)

h. Crispy steamed vegetables and grilled fish and chicken are all tasty parts of a low-fat, heart-friendly diet.
(description)

Exercise 7

*Read each topic sentence. What information would you expect the writer to include in the paragraph? Write a question that the supporting sentences should answer. Use a **who? what? where? when? why? or how?** question.*

In 2008, smoking was banned in all public facilities.
Why was smoking banned?

- 1. Texas is home to several kinds of poisonous snakes.
.....
- 2. Classrooms without windows have negative effects on students.
.....
- 3. Computer technology will one day eliminate the use of libraries.
.....
- 4. Quebec City is a wonderful place to raise children.
.....
- 5. I will never forget the day I got married.
.....

Exercise 8

A - Write the concluding sentence from this paragraph and then check its purpose.

A Great Tourist Destination

New York and Boston attract millions of tourists, but I think one of the best cities to visit on the east coast of the United States is Washington, D.C. It has some of the most interesting **landmarks** and tourist **spots** in the country. There are many monuments to visit, such as the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the Washington Monument, which is the tallest building in Washington. For more excitement, the area called Georgetown in northwest Washington is famous for its shopping and restaurants. Finally, there is the White House tour. On this tour, the guide **leads** visitors as they walk through many of the rooms in the White House and **view** the home of the president of the United States. Although Washington, D.C., does not have the large number of visitors that New York or Boston does, I think this city is one of the best destinations for tourists.

Topic: Washington, D.C.

What does the concluding statement do?

- restates the main idea
- offers a suggestion
- gives an opinion
- makes a prediction

B - Read the paragraph below. Then answer the questions.

There are two main reasons why going to college is no longer the only way to ensure a sound financial future. First, the cost of college is out of the reach of many young people. While financial aid is often available, students usually graduate with an enormous amount of debt that puts them at an immediate financial disadvantage. College graduates burdened with debt are less likely to be able to buy a home, get married, have children, or begin saving for retirement. Second, college is also not designed to teach young people how to be successful. Traits associated with success - leadership skills, people skills, maturity, passion, and drive - are learned by doing real things in the real world, and cannot be taught in a classroom. Many companies these days aren't looking for degrees; they are looking for self-motivated individuals with real-world experience.

- 1. What is the main point of the paragraph?
.....
.....
.....

2. Write a concluding sentence for this paragraph.

.....
.....
.....

3. What will your concluding statement do?

- restates the main idea offers a suggestion gives an opinion makes a prediction

C - Read the paragraph below and answer the following questions.

Parents should not yell at children because it can have long-term negative effects on their future. Parents who yell at their children are more likely to have children with behavioral and emotional problems. Adolescents are particularly at risk for turning to destructive behaviors like drugs, vandalism, and violence, and are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of aggression, and depression. A recent study suggests that in fact, yelling at children is as damaging as actual physical abuse.

1. What is the main point of this paragraph?

.....
.....
.....

2. What is the author's purpose?

- inform persuade entertain

3. What final thought do you think the author would like the reader to take away from this paragraph?

.....
.....
.....

4. Write a concluding sentence for this paragraph

.....
.....
.....

5. What will your concluding sentence do?

- restates the main idea offers a suggestion gives an opinion makes a prediction