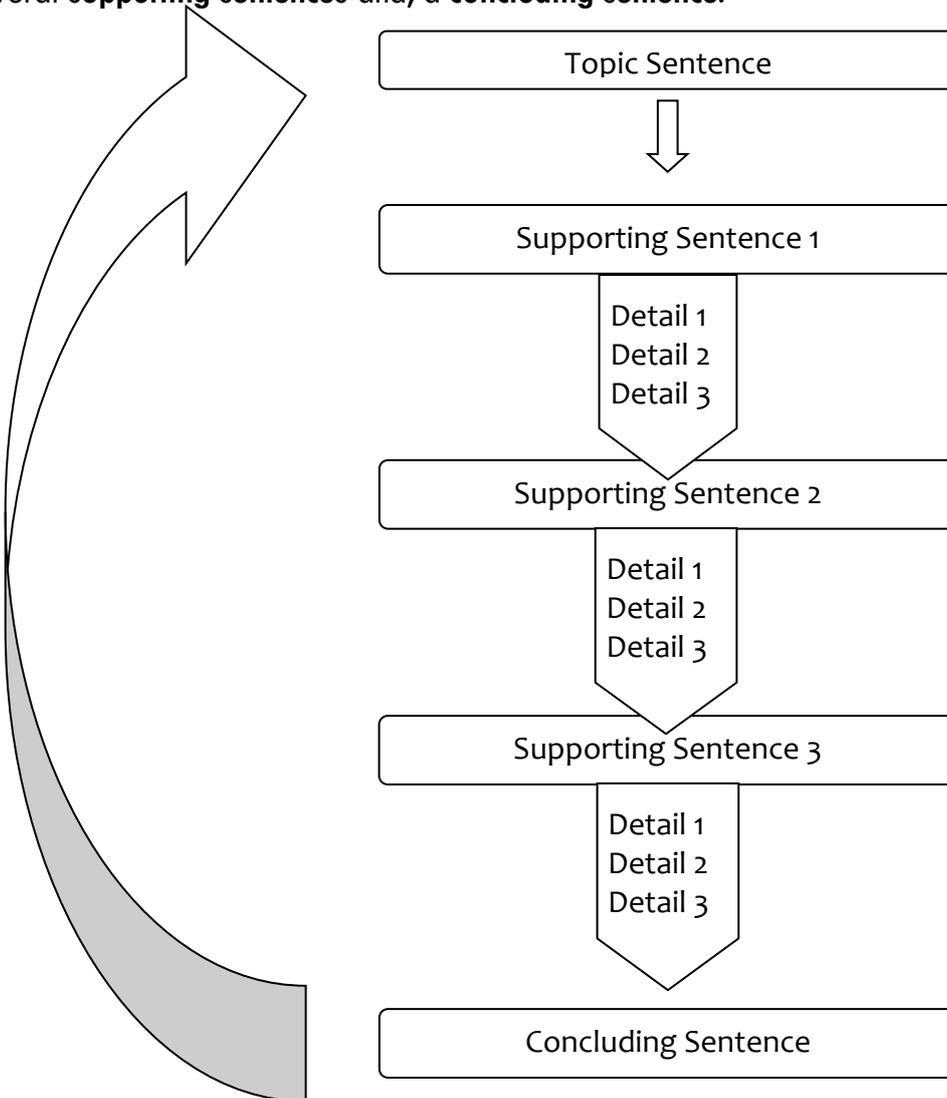


Writing Focus: Writing a well structured paragraph

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

A paragraph is a group of sentences about one main idea. This means that each paragraph has a **topic** (what you are writing about) and a **focus** (what you want to say about that topic). In a good paragraph all of the sentences will be connected to the topic and focus.

What does a good simple paragraph look like? Most simple paragraphs will include: a **topic sentence**, several **supporting sentences** and, a **concluding sentence**.



Topic Sentence

Paragraphs need to have topic sentences. It is a way of organizing and expressing the main idea of the paragraph! The topic sentence is often (but not always), the first sentence in the paragraph.

- It answers questions like why, how, or where.
- It has supporting sentences or relevant details.
- It can prove, explain, or describe something.

A good topic sentence of a paragraph contains two elements: the topic and the controlling idea. – The Topic = The subject of the paragraph

– The Controlling Idea = limits the topic, shows the reader how the writer will limit the topic.

Adjusting to Canadian winters has been a real challenge for me.

Topic: Adjusting to Canadian Winters **Controlling Idea:** has been a real challenge for me.

A. Choose the best topic sentence

_____ Mine is ten years old, and it is always breaking down when I need it. It costs a lot of money for repairs each year. Also, the heater doesn't work anymore, so it is cold in the winter. I really wish I could change it.

- A. My car is very old.
- B. I wish I could buy a new car.
- C. My car costs a lot of money.



_____ The teachers are all very old and boring. The courses are not good. The buildings are old and dirty and there is no heating in them. Worst of all, it takes me two hours to get there. I wish I had gone to a different college.

- A. I don't like the teachers at my college.
- B. I really hate my college.
- C. My college is too old.



_____ You've probably heard that older men die before older women virtually everywhere in the world. In the United States, women are expected to live an average of 80.4 years, while men live only 75.2 years. Sociologists attribute many factors to this trend. For example, men have higher testosterone levels than women, which may make men more likely to abuse alcohol and tobacco, drive aggressively, and engage in other life-threatening behaviors. Men also choose riskier types of work and become involved in wartime aggression, which are connected to men's decreased life expectancy. Studies also show that women are less likely to experience life-threatening illnesses and health problems than men are.

- A. women's health
- B. men and risky behaviors
- C. men's life expectancy



B. Write good topic sentences to begin each of the following paragraphs.

1. _____
Americans relaxing at home, for example, may put on kimonos, which is a Japanese word. Americans who live in a warm climate may take an afternoon siesta on an outdoor patio without even realizing that these are Spanish words. In their gardens, they may enjoy the fragrance of jasmine flowers, a word that came into English from Persian. They may even relax on a chaise longue, while eating Pavlova, words of French and Russian origin, respectively.
2. _____
In European universities, students are not required to attend classes. In fact, professors in Germany generally do not know the names of the students enrolled in their courses. In the United States, however, students are required to attend all classes and may be penalized if they do not. Furthermore, in the European system, there is usually just one comprehensive examination at the end of the students' entire four or five years of study. In the American system, on the other hand, there are usually numerous quizzes, texts, and homework assignments, and there is almost always a final examination in each course at the end of the semester.
3. _____
For example, the Eskimos, living in a treeless region of snow and ice, sometimes build temporary homes out of thick blocks of ice. People who live in deserts, on the other hand, use the most available material, mud or clay, which provides good insulation from the heat. In Northern Europe, Russia and other areas of the world where forests are plentiful, people usually construct their homes out of wood. In the islands of the South Pacific, where there is a plentiful supply of bamboo and palm, people use these tough, fibrous plants to build their home.

Supporting Sentences

The supporting sentences of a paragraph develop the main idea presented in the topic sentence. Good supporting sentences have different goals. Writers vary them to: • explain • describe. • give reasons • give facts. • give examples. • define.

It is essential that your supporting sentences stay on topic and clearly relate to the main idea of the topic sentence. This connection between the supporting sentences and the topic sentence is called *unity*. If your supporting sentences are irrelevant or off topic, your paragraph will not be strong and may be unclear.

C. Read the following paragraph:

It has been argued that children are born with language and have the ability to recognise sounds in their mother tongue. Bailey (2010) claimed that this ability to understand language occurs in the womb during pregnancy. This explains how children learn a language so rapidly during the first few years of life and can respond so quickly to sounds that their parents produce. Similarly Johnson (2011) highlights children's ability to distinguish between sounds in their mother tongue at a very young age. Collectively this would suggest that children are equipped with a set of pre-determined skills that enables them to quickly learn a language.

Which sentence within the paragraph corresponds with each of the following descriptors?

Descriptor	Sentence
Topic sentence	It has been argued that children are born with language and have the ability to recognize sounds in their mother tongue
Supporting information/example	
Explanation/ Elaboration	
Reasoning	

D. 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 and label in the parentheses the kind of supporting sentence : reason - fact - description - example

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. (_____)
- b. ____ They are preferred by the general public because they help with weight reduction. (_____)
- c. ____ Low-fat diets are recommended by most physicians. (_____)
- d. ____ Many athletes eat high-protein foods, such as meat, beans, and nuts. (_____)
- e. ____ Low-fat foods include fruits, vegetables, and pasta. (_____)
- f. ____ Because they are easy to find in stores, low-fat foods are convenient. (_____)
- g. ____ Athletes generally eat high-protein diets to give them more energy. (_____)
- h. ____ Crispy steamed vegetables and grilled fish and chicken are all tasty parts of a low-fat, heart-friendly diet. (_____)

E. Look at the topic sentences below and choose the best 4 supporting sentences for each one.

Learning English is very difficult. Firstly, _____.

In addition, _____.

Also, _____.

Finally, _____.

I think it will take a long time to learn English well.



- a) I don't like speaking English.
- b) We don't have the chance to practice with native speakers.
- c) Many people in the world learn English.
- d) The grammar is very different from my native language.
- e) The pronunciation is difficult to get right.
- f) It is easy to learn English vocabulary.
- g) I have only one English class a week.

I hate my job. For one thing, _____.

Another thing is that _____.

Also, _____.

Concluding sentence

The concluding sentence is the last sentence of the paragraph. It concludes, or wraps up, a paragraph. It lets the reader know that you have finished talking about the idea introduced by the topic sentence. Perhaps the easiest concluding sentence to write is one that simply restates the main idea or summarizes the main points of the paragraph. Remember that the introduction begins general and ends specific. The conclusion begins specific and moves to the general

I. Choose the correct concluding sentence.

Happiness and life style go together. Some people constantly complain about petty things. They hunger after luxuries which they cannot afford. They become frustrated and sick. Whereas some others take things easy and keep themselves happy, cool and poised. In other words, happiness can be experienced by cultivating healthy thinking.

a) Happy are those who take life easy.

b) It is always advisable to make a habit experiencing happiness naturally.

Email has been very influential in shaping the way we communicate. It has improved the volume and mode of communication. Email is one of the most popular uses of the Internet. It is easy to send an electronic message if we have an email account. In no time we can send information across the world to as many as we want. It not only saves time in communication but also helps us overcome many limitations like time and distance.

a) Email has revolutionized communication.

b) Email is one of the important modes of communication.

Parents can help their children succeed in school by getting involved in their studies. They should get to know their children's teachers by attending school activities as often as possible. They should also talk about what their children are learning in school. Another good idea is to look over children's homework before they hand it in, and help them with any questions or problems.

a) In short, parents need to be engaged in their child's studies in order to ensure success.

c) By doing these relatively simple things, parents can make a huge difference.

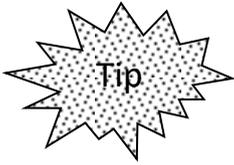
b) These are just a few ways parents can be part of their child's education, and the child is sure to benefit.

d) Parents must get involved in their children's studies if they want them to succeed.

J. Read each paragraph and: 1. Underline the topic sentence and write TS above it. 2. Circle any sentence that is not a good supporting sentence based on the controlling idea in the topic sentence. 3. Write a concluding sentence on the lines provided.

College Adjustments

When I first started going to college, I was surprised at all the studying that was required. I had to adjust my study habits because in high school I hardly ever studied, yet my grades were still fairly good. At the university, it seemed that all my professors thought their class was the most important class. Each professor gave me a tremendous amount of homework every night. As a result, my free time became very limited. Nights out with friends and time spent surfing on the net was replaced with reading assignments, group projects, learning activities, and research. My university classes kept me so busy that I could only go out on Saturday nights. This kind of schedule was a big change from high school, where I used to play sports, have fun, and go out every other night.



When you write your paragraph, use transitions to help the reader identify:

- supporting sentences
- details and examples
- conclusion

Using transitions

Transitions are words that help the reader move smoothly from one idea to another. A transition acts like a road sign or signal flag to let readers know where they are and to tell readers what to expect coming up next in a paragraph or essay. We use transition words to: emphasize the organization of your ideas (least important to the most important, reason, time, order, events...)

Emphasize the relationship of one idea to another (major point, example to illustrate a point, similar or opposite idea to the previous one)

Transitions to show supporting sentences:

First, Second, Third, Finally

First, Next, Last

For one thing, For another thing, Finally

First, More significant (important), Most significant (important)

First, Even worse (better), Worst (Best) of all

Transitions to show examples:

For example,

For instance,

Also, in addition, (to add another example)

Another (to add another example)

Transitions to show conclusion

Truly,

All in all,

In conclusion,

As you can see,

On the whole,

In the following paragraph, transitions have been removed. Write an appropriate transition from the list in each of the blanks in the paragraph. Two have been done for you.

Sources for College Writing

Students can draw on a variety of sources to help them with writing assignments. _____, they can draw on personal experiences. _____, for an assignment about communication skills, a writer might think about the way he or she communicates through conversations with others while at work or at home. _____, a writer might look at ways he or she communicates with others electronically via email or texting or Facebook. Students might _____ find examples of written communication skills by looking at skills they've learned for previous writing assignments. _____, student writers can look for ideas from other people's experiences. _____, writers can interview other students or even family members. _____, a writer may have heard others talk about this topic, maybe in class. _____ Another _____ source would be television shows on the topic of communication. _____, college writers may find that they need to do some research to complete an assignment. _____, lots of experts have written articles or books on the topic of communication skills. _____, a search of "communication skills" on the internet might provide useful information; _____ moreover _____, reference librarians can help students find research materials in special collections or databases. _____, college writers need to be able to draw on a combination of personal experience, observations of others, and research materials to develop their written assignments.