



The Writing Center

Basic Paragraph Writing



Parts of a Paragraph

A basic paragraph has three parts: 1) a topic sentence, 2) supporting sentences, and 3) a concluding sentence. This handout is intended only for a single paragraph. For a multiple-paragraph or an analytical paragraph handout, please refer to the MEAL handout and/or DLA.

1. Topic Sentence

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph. It introduces the main idea of the paragraph. All subsequent points made in the paragraphs should support the topic sentence. Strong paragraphs are typically about one main idea or topic, which is often explicitly stated in a topic sentence. **Good topic sentences should always contain a topic and a controlling idea.**

Topic: The main subject matter or idea covered in the paragraph.

Controlling idea: This idea focuses the topic by providing direction to the composition.

The following topic sentences all contain a topic and a controlling idea. When paragraphs contain a clearly stated topic sentence such as one of the following, the reader will know what to expect and understand the ideas better.

Examples of topic sentences:

- There are several advantages to online education.

Topic: Online education Controlling idea: several advantages

- Effective leadership requires specific qualities that anyone can develop.

Topic: Effective leadership Controlling idea: requires specific qualities that anyone can develop

2. Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences are sentences that come after the topic sentence and make up the body of a paragraph. They provide details that develop and support the main idea of the paragraph. Students should write them by providing supporting facts, details, and examples.

Note: Just adding information, numbers, and statistics may not be enough. Students should provide information that helps clarify their thoughts and make sure that the information added is well explained and in their own words (see examples below).

The following are common sources of supporting details:

- Statistics, polls, percentages

Ex: Recent studies that compare student's test scores show that children who are exposed to structured learning activities outside the home environment are better able to adapt to formalized instruction (in grades kindergarten through third grade) than children who remain at home.

- Facts, details, reasons, examples

Ex: Washington, D.C., 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.



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- Personal experience, stories, anecdotes, examples from your life

Ex: My favorite dish is pasta with fresh vegetables. The pasta is cooked just right, and the vegetables include broccoli, onions, tomatoes, and corn. My second favorite dish is spicy chicken and brown rice soup. The chicken is a little hot for some people's taste buds, but many people really like the fact that you get brown rice instead of the usual bland white rice.

3. Concluding Sentence

The closing sentence is the last sentence in a paragraph.

The closing sentence:

- restates the big idea of the topic sentence using different words or a different order.
- summarizes the big idea of the paragraph without repeating the exact same words.
- gives the reader something to think about. So what?

Ex1: Topic Sentence: Scientists have learned to supplement the sense of sight in numerous ways.

Concluding Sentence: Thus, almost every type of electromagnetic radiation yet discovered has been used to extend our sense of sight in some way.

Ex2: Topic Sentence: Studies have shown that women are less likely to be believed when talking about their symptoms to medical providers.

Concluding Sentence: The treatment of women in the medical field is still an area of concern in today's hospitals.

Sample Paragraph

Topic Sentence

Canada is one of the best countries in the world to live in. First, Canada has an

excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live. **Concluding Sentence**

Supporting Sentences