**I. What Is a Paragraph? An Overview**

**\*Introduction**

**A. The Definition of the Paragraph**

A **paragraph** is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences develops **one** main idea. The number of sentences is unimportant; however, the paragraph should be long enough to **develop** the **main idea** clearly. The paragraph must start with an **indentation**. A paragraph may also be one part of a longer piece of writing, such as a chapter of a book or an essay.

**B. Paragraph Structure**

The following model contains all the elements of a good paragraph. Read it carefully two or three times, and try to analyse its structure.

**Gold**

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty-three centuries ago. Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications. The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection outside the spaceship. In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

\***lustrous**: glowing \***untarnished**: unchanged in colour

\***corrosion**: chemical damage \***minted**: made, manufactured

\***Macedonian**: from an ancient Mediterranean culture \***plated**: covered with a thin layer

**\*The Three Parts of a Paragraph**

A paragraph has **three** major structural **parts**: a **topic sentence**, **supporting sentences**, and a **concluding sentence**.

The **topic** **sentence** states the **main idea** of the paragraph. It not only names the topic of the paragraph but also limits the topic to one or two areas that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph. The specific area is called the **controlling idea**. Notice how the topic sentence of the model paragraph states both the topic and the controlling idea:

(Topic) (Controlling Idea)

• Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics.

The **supporting sentences** **develop** the topic sentence. In other words, they explain the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples, facts, statistics, and quotations. Some of the supporting sentences that explain the topic sentence about gold are

• First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion.

• Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science.

• The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits.

The **concluding sentence** signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember:

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

**\*Unity and coherence**

In addition to the three structural parts of a paragraph, a good paragraph also has the elements of **unity** and **coherence**.

**Unity** means that you discuss only **one****main idea** in a paragraph. The main idea is stated in the topic sentence, and then each and every supporting sentencedevelops that idea. If, for example, you announce in your topic sentence that you are going to discuss two important characteristics of gold, discuss only those. Do not discuss any other ideas, such as the price of gold or gold mining.

**Coherence** means that your paragraph is **easy** to **read** and **understand** because (1) your supporting sentences are in some kind of **logical order**, and (2) your ideas are connected by the use of appropriate connecting **transition signals**. For example, in the paragraph about gold, there are two supporting ideas: gold is beautiful, and gold is useful. Each of these supporting ideas is discussed, one after the other, and an example is given for each one. This is one kind of logical order. Furthermore, the relationship between the ideas is clearly shown by using appropriate transition words and phrases, such as "first of all," "for example," "another important characteristic," and "in conclusion."

In summary, a **well-written paragraph** contains five elements: a **topic** **sentence**, **supporting sentences**, a **concluding sentence**, **unity**, and **coherence**.

**I. The Topic Sentence**

Every good paragraph has a **topic sentence**, which clearly states the **topic** and the **controlling idea** of the paragraph. It is a **complete sentence**. It is usually (but not always) the first sentence in the paragraph.

A **topic sentence** is the **most important sentence** in a paragraph. It briefly indicates what the paragraph is going to discuss. For this reason, the topic sentence is a helpful guide to both the writer and the reader. The writer can see what information to include (and what information to exclude). The reader can see what the paragraph is going to be about and is, therefore, better prepared to understand it.

There are **three important points** to remember about a topic sentence:

**1.** A **topic** **sentence** is a **complete** **sentence**; that is, it contains a subject and a predicate. The following is not acomplete sentence:

The importance of gold.

**2.** A **topic sentence** contains both a **topic** and a **controlling idea**. It names the topic and then limits the topic to a specific area to be discussed in the space of a single paragraph.

Examples:

(**Topic**) (**Controlling Idea**)

• **Gold**, a precious metal, is prized for **two important characteristics**.

(**Topic**) (**Controlling Idea**)

• **Driving on freeways** requires **skill and alertness**.

**3.** A **topic sentence** is the most **general statement** in the paragraph because it gives only the **main** **idea**. It does not give any specific details.

**\* Writing topic sentences**

When you write a topic sentence, remember this: a topic sentence should be **neither too general nor too specific**. If it is too general, the reader cannot tell exactly what the paragraph is going to discuss. If it is too specific, the writer may not have anything left to write about in the rest of the paragraph.

Think of the topic sentence as being like the name of a particular course on a restaurant menu. When you order food in a restaurant, you want to know more about a particular course than just “meat” or “soup” or “salad.” You want to know generally what kind of salad it is. Potato salad? Mixed green salad? Fruit salad? However, you do not necessarily want to know all of its ingredients.

Similarly, the reader of the paragraph wants to know generally what to expect in a paragraph, but he or she does not want to learn all of the specific details in the first sentence.

**Example:**

**Too general :** American food is terrible.

**Too specific :** American food is tasteless and greasy because Americans use too many canned, frozen, and prepackaged foods and because everything is fried in oil or butter.

**Good :** American food is tasteless and greasy.

**Exercise 1: Recognizing the Topic Sentence**

Remember, the topic sentence indicates the main idea of a paragraph and is the most general statement in the paragraph.

Decide which of the following sentences is the **topic sentence** of the paragraph. Decide the **order** of the **supporting sentences**.

**Paragraph 1**

**a.** It enables customers to do several banking transactions twenty-four hours a day.

**b.** In addition, a customer can transfer funds between accounts or get a cash advance on a credit card.

**c.** An automated teller machine (ATM) is a convenient miniature bank.

**d.** For example, a customer can use an ATM to deposit money and withdraw a limited amount of cash.

\***transaction**: operation \***customer**: client \***funds**: money

\***convenient**: suitable \***miniature**: small

**Paragraph 2**

**a.** Driving a standard-shift vehicle is easy if you follow these steps.

**b**. After that, give the car some gas, and slowly release the clutch pedal until you start moving.

**c.** Next, move the gearshift into first gear. On most cars, this is the straight-up position.

\_\_ **d.** Finally, be ready to shift into higher gears -second, third, and so on. A diagram of where to find each gear usually appears on the gearshift knob. With practice, you will learn to start up smoothly and shift without the car making grinding noises.

**e.** First, push clutch pedal down. The clutch is the pedal on the left.

**Exercise 2:** What is a topic sentence? Read the paragraph. Look at the underlined sentence. This is the topic sentence. Tick () the correct information about topic sentences.

My favourite drink is tea, and I drink a lot of it. I always have tea in the morning for breakfast. I make a pot of tea, and then I drink it all myself. Sometimes, I have another pot before lunch. At four o’clock, I make a cup of mint tea. Mint tea is good for waking up and studying.

A topic sentence is

 at or near the start of the paragraph

 at the end of the paragraph

 the main idea of the paragraph

 a small detail from the paragraph

 one or two words

 a complete sentence

**Exercise 3:** Read the paragraphs. Underline the topic sentences.

I would like to tell you about my uncle. His name is George, and he is thirty-nine years old. He is my father’s youngest brother. I really like him because he is very kind and very funny. He also tells us interesting stories about the places he visits.

My brothers all have jobs. My oldest brother, Edward, is a doctor at the hospital in the centre of the city, and the second oldest, Daniel, is an accountant in an office near our home. My youngest brother is a policeman. I am the only brother who is still at school.

**Exercise 4:** Read the paragraphs. Write the number of the topic sentence next to the correct paragraph.

**Topic sentences**

**1**. I lived in a small town when I was a child.

**2**. When I have my own children, I want to move to a small town.

**3**. There are two main advantages of living in a small town.

**Paragraph A: Topic sentence \_\_\_\_**

First, you know everyone, and everyone knows you. This helps you to feel safe, and it is friendlier. Secondly, it is quiet, and there are fewer cars. This means there is less pollution than in a big town or city.

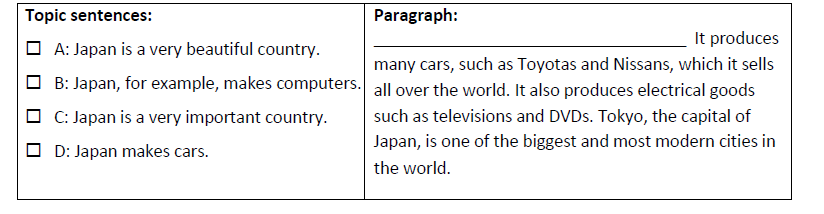
**Paragraph B: Topic sentence \_\_\_\_**

It was a very nice place to live in then. Now, it is much bigger than before. More people live there and some big businesses opened offices there. My parents still live there, but they say it was better in the past.

**Paragraph C: Topic sentence \_\_\_\_**

I don’t want my children to live in a big city because a big city is not as friendly or as safe as a village. I want to move to the village where my grandparents live. The children can play in the street there, and everyone knows each other.

**Exercise 5:** Read the paragraph and tick () the best topic sentence.



What is wrong with the other topic sentences? Match them to the problems.

|  |
| --- |
| **Problems: Topic sentence:**  It is an example. \_\_\_\_\_\_  It is a smaller idea, not the main idea. \_\_\_\_\_\_  It is about something different from the other sentences. \_\_\_\_\_\_ |

**Exercise 6: Choosing Topic Sentences**

Choose the best topic sentence for each group of supporting sentences.

**1.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I usually go skiing every weekend in the winter even though it is expensive. I love the feeling of flying down a mountain. The views are beautiful from the top of a mountain and along the trails. Even the danger of falling and getting hurt cannot keep me away from the slopes on a winter day.

a) Skiing is expensive.

b) Skiing is my favourite sport.

c) Skiing is dangerous. (\***trail**: path, way / \***slope**: falling ground)

**2.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. North Americans send cards for many occasions. They send cards to family and friends on birthdays and holidays. They also send thank-you cards, get well cards, graduation cards, and congratulation cards. It is very common to buy cards in stores and send them through the mail, but turning on the computer and sending cards over the internet is also popular.

a) Sending cards is very popular in North America.

b) Birthday cards are the most popular kind of cards.

c) It is important to send thank-you cards.

**3.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ . I enjoy summer sports like water skiing and baseball. The weather is usually sunny and hot, so I can go to the beach almost every day. Gardening is my hobby, and I spend many summer days working in my garden. Unfortunately, the days pass too quickly in summer.

a) I like to garden in summer.

b) Summer is my favourite season.

c) Summer is too short.

**Exercise 7: Writing a Topic Sentence**

Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Make sure your topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph.

**1.** .............................................................................................. It is always sunny and warm. The beaches are gorgeous, with soft white sand and beautiful water. There are many fine restaurants in the Miami area, and most of the hotels offer terrific entertainment nightly. It is no wonder that Miami is my first choice for a vacation destination.

(\***gorgeous**: wonderful / \***terrific**: great)

**2.** .............................................................................................. He has collected stamps and coins ever since he was a child. He is very proud of his valuable collections. Paul also enjoys painting and drawing. Recently, he has become interested in gardening. Out of all his hobbies, Paul’s favourite one is reading. He usually reads at least one book every week. Paul keeps busy with all of his hobbies.

**3.** .............................................................................................. I cannot wait to come home from school and eat the delicious meals she has prepared. She is famous for her desserts like peach pie and chocolate soufflé. She is always experimenting with new recipes and trying different ingredients. No one in the world can cook the way my mother does.

**II. The Supporting Sentences**

The supporting sentences develop the main idea in the topic sentence. They add details to the topic.

**\* Recognizing Supporting Sentences**

**Read the following paragraph and underline the supporting sentences.**

The use of the internet has grown very quickly. In 1983, there were 562 computers connected to the internet. By the turn of the century, there were 72.3 million computers in 247 countries on-line. Experts say that the internet is now growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent a year. As time goes on, the internet becomes more and more popular.

**\* Irrelevant Supporting Sentences**

Every supporting sentence in a paragraph must relate to the main idea stated in the topic sentence. A sentence that does not support the main idea does not belong in the paragraph; therefore, such a sentence should be omitted. When a sentence does not belong in a paragraph, it is called an **irrelevant sentence**.

**Example:** The students in the class come from many different parts of the world. Some are from European countries, such as France, Spain, and Italy. Others are from Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia. Still other students were born in Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. **Korean food is delicious**. The largest number of students is from Latin American countries like Mexico, Venezuela and Peru. The class is an interesting mix of people from many different countries.

**\* Recognizing Irrelevant Sentences**

**There is one irrelevant sentence in the following paragraph. Find that sentence, and cross it out.**

There are several ways people can conserve natural resources. One way is to turn lights off and appliances when they are not in use. Another way is to drive cars less. My favourite kind of cars is convertible. Finally, by reusing things like bottles and plastic bags, people can reduce the amount of waste. By practicing these simple guidelines, we can save our natural resources.

**\*Connectors:** Connectors are used to link ideas together and to give paragraphs coherence. They perform different functions.

**\* Useful connectors:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Transition Words (Connectors)** | | | | |
| **Meaning /**  **Function** | **Sentence Connectors** | **Clause Connectors** | | **Other Connectors** |
| **Conjunctive Adverbs** | **Coordinating Conjunctions** | **Subordinating Conjunctions** |
|  |  |  |  | as well as  an additional (+ noun) |
| **Addition** | additionally again furthermore moreover besides also too in addition | and |  |
| **Opposition** | however nevertheless nonetheless instead still otherwise on the other hand on the contrary in contrast | but  or  yet | although though even though whereas while in spite of the fact that despite the fact that | in spite of (+ noun)  despite (+ noun) |
| **Time** | afterward at the same time in the meantime meanwhile later then |  | after before when whenever while as as soon as once since until |  |
| **Cause** |  | for | as because since | because of due to - owing to |
| **Result** | as a result as a consequence accordingly therefore consequently hence thus | so |  |  |
| **Comparison** | similarly likewise in the same way also | and | as as if just as |  |
| **Explanation** | in fact indeed that is to say in other words |  |  |  |
| **Logical Order** | firstly secondly thirdly next last finally |  |  |  |
| **Order of Importance** | more importantly most significantly above all primarily essentially |  |  |  |
| **Condition** |  |  | if even if unless as long as provided that providing that in case that |  |
| **Illustration** | for example for instance |  |  | an example of (+noun) such as (+noun) |
| **Conclusion** | finally in conclusion in summary in brief in short indeed to sum up all in all therefore |  |  |  |

**Exercise: The Supporting Sentences** (The use of **connectors** is important.)

**I**. **Develop** this **topic** **sentence** into a **paragraph**: "Learning English is very difficult."

**II**. Look at the **topic** **sentences** below and **choose** the **best** four **supporting sentences**.

**1**. Learning English is very difficult. Firstly, ....................................................................... .......................................................................................**.** In addition, .......................................... .......................................................................................**.** Also,.....................................................

...............................**.** Finally, .....................................................................................**.** In short, I think it will take a long time to learn English well.

a) I do not like speaking English.

b) We do not have the chance to practise 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.

**2**. I hate my job. For one thing, .....................................................................**.** Another thing is that ....................................................................................................**.** Also, ............................

..............................................................................................**.** However, the worst thing is that .......................................................................**.** In brief, I think it is time to look for a new job.

a) My colleagues are friendly.

b) The salary is very low.

c) My boss is always getting angry and shouting at me.

d) The office is in a great location.

e) I want to work there forever.

f) I have to work until about nine o’clock every night.

g) Our office building is old and dirty.

**III. The Concluding Sentence**

The paragraphs end with a concluding sentence. This sentence states the main idea of the paragraph again using different words. It summarizes the main points of the paragraph or makes a final comment on the topic.

A concluding sentence serves three purposes:

**1.** It signals the end of the paragraph.  
**2.** It summarizes the main point of the paragraph.  
**3.** It gives a final comment on the topic and leaves the reader with the most important ideas to think about.

\*Use one of the following end-of-paragraph signals to introduce your concluding sentence:

**End-of-Paragraph Signals**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **These are followed by a comma** | **These are not followed by a comma** |
| Finally, As a result,  In conclusion, Indeed,  In summary, In brief,  Therefore, In short,  Thus, | We can see that...  It is clear that...  These examples show that...  There can be no doubt that...  The evidence suggests that... |

**Exercise 1: Recognizing Concluding Sentences**

**Read the paragraph. Underline the concluding sentence.**

My favourite holiday was last year’s holiday. We went to Scotland for three weeks. We visited the big cities, and then we travelled to the north. We saw some beautiful countryside and mountains. The food was also delicious. In brief, those three weeks were the best holiday ever!

**Exercise 2: Read the paragraph and tick (****) the best concluding sentence.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Concluding Sentences:**   **A:** He is very good at football.   **B:** I study Business at college.   **C:** For example, I will see him next week.  **D:** In short, he will always be my best friend. | **The Paragraph:**  Paul is my best friend. I met him at school when we were seven. We were in the same class for ten years! After school, I went to college, and Paul started working in a bank. Now, he lives in a different city, but we see each other every month. ........................................................................................ |

**What is wrong with the other concluding sentences? Match them to the problems.**

|  |
| --- |
| **Problems: Topic sentence:**  It gives new information about the topic. \_\_\_\_\_\_  It gives another example. \_\_\_\_\_\_  It is not about the main point. \_\_\_\_\_\_ |

**Exercise 3: Writing Concluding Sentences**

**Write a concluding sentence for each paragraph.**

There are many reasons why I like wearing a uniform to school. First of all, it saves time. I do not have to spend time picking out my clothes every morning. Wearing a uniform also saves money. It is cheaper to purchase a new uniform than to go out and buy lots of school clothes. In addition, I do not have the pressure of keeping up with the latest styles. Most importantly, wearing a school uniform gives me a sense that I belong. I really think that it adds to the feeling of school spirit and community. .................................................................

Credit cards have a lot of advantages. First of all, credit cards are convenient because you do not have to carry a lot of cash around. You can buy the products and services you need even if you do not have cash in your pocket. In addition, credit cards are very helpful in emergencies. Finally, you can become a better money manager as you learn to use credit cards responsibly. ..................................................................................................................................