

# Chapter 4- The Paragraph

A paragraph is a series of sentences all relating to the same topic or central idea. The aim of all paragraphs is to communicate to the reader that idea clearly and effectively. There is no hard and fast rule about the length of a paragraph; it will depend on the topic and what the writer wants to say. The paragraph should be long enough to develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence sufficiently. It should do what it sets out to do in the topic sentence. If the topic sentence states that you will be explaining how to make pizza, don't forget the steps about turning on the oven and at which temperature and how long the pizza should cook. Regardless of the length, the paragraph must contain only one idea. Any irrelevant sentences must be eliminated from the paragraph to ensure that it maintains its unity.



## Parts of a Paragraph

There are three parts to a paragraph: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a conclusion. Think of a paragraph as an Oreo cookie. The first and last sentences are like the top and bottom chocolate cookie of an Oreo; they are general statements about the topic, which tie the paragraph together. The middle sentences are like the white creamy filling, which contains information, facts, opinions, and examples that support or develop the topic sentence.

### 1. Topic Sentence

There are differences between a topic sentence and a title. The title is above the paragraph and expands the topic. It should indicate what the essay is about, provoke interest, and be brief. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in the paragraph and limits the topic of the paragraph. A title is usually not a complete sentence. The topic sentence is always a complete thought or sentence. Most words in the title are capitalized. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized in the topic sentence.

The most important sentence of a paragraph is the topic sentence because it contains the main ideas of the paragraph. There are three elements in a topic sentence: the topic, a controlling idea, and the point of view of the writer.

#### A. Topic

The topic is the subject, what is being written about in the paragraph. The main idea expressed in the topic sentence should not be too general or too specific. If it is too general, it will be difficult to develop it adequately in a single paragraph. If it is too specific, there will be nothing left to say to develop the idea in the paragraph.

Look at the following topic sentences.

#### **Everyone can benefit from exercise.**

This topic sentence is too general. There are many different kinds of exercise and different kinds of exercise have different benefits. Not all of them can be developed within one paragraph.

#### **Doing aerobics for thirty minutes a day will strengthen a person's cardio-vascular system by twenty five percent.**

This topic sentence is too specific. There is nothing else that can be said to support this statement in the remainder of the paragraph.

**There are three reasons why I exercise everyday.**

This sentence is an adequate topic sentence. It limits the discussion of the paragraph to only discussing the reasons that the writer exercises. Telling what those three reasons are and what benefits the writer gains from exercise can be expanded upon in the paragraph.

**B. Controlling idea**

The controlling idea limits the topic of the paragraph to one definite idea or one aspect of the topic that represents a particular idea, feeling, or opinion. The controlling idea must not be too broad; it must be specific enough for the subject to be discussed within one paragraph.

Look at these three topic sentences. Each has same topic, but contain different controlling ideas.

**Topic**

The Grand Canyon is a favorite vacation spot for travelers worldwide.  
(controlling idea: vacation spot)

The Grand Canyon is noted for its awe inspiring panorama.  
(controlling idea: panorama)

The Grand Canyon is an ideal area to view the geologic history of the earth.  
(controlling idea: geologic history)

**Topic**

The television is a major source of home entertainment.  
(controlling idea: home entertainment)

The television is an effective educational tool.  
(controlling idea: educational tool)

The television has become smaller since its initial invention.  
(controlling idea: become smaller)

A divided topic sentence is useful in ensuring the sentence has a controlling idea. In a divided topic sentence, the writer specifies or explains the divisions of the topic. Look at the following sentences that illustrate a divided topic sentence.

*There are **three** major professional sports in America.*

***Five** essential ingredients are required in learning a foreign language.*

*To become a successful, writer one needs **four** basic skills.*

All three of the topic sentences above clearly limit what will be discussed in the paragraph (three sports, five ingredients, and four skills).

**C. Point of view**

A good topic sentence also expresses the point of view of the writer. It may contain the opinion or attitude of the writer. In the topic sentence

**Digital cameras make photography easy and fun.**

The writer's point of view is easily determined- it's easy and fun.

### Exercise 4.3

Identify the topic and controlling idea of the following topic sentences.

1. Children's educational programs on TV are superior to cartoons for young minds.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Racial discrimination in the work place is a waste of human resources.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The exploration of space needlessly expends resources that could be put to better use elsewhere.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Hobbies provide people with many benefits.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Learning a foreign language is also about learning the culture of that country.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Becoming a doctor requires skills other than just medical knowledge.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
7. The time I spent in the Peace Corps was a horrendous experience.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Driving in Korea presents foreign drivers with many challenges.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
9. A computer is a must for today's college students.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Teaching children the basics of fire prevention at home is fast and easy.  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_

**Look at the following paragraph and note the supporting sentences.**

The invention of the automobile has provided many benefits to travelers. With a car, man is able to travel vast distances in short periods of time. What once took a two or three weeks on horseback can now be done in a matter of hours. The comfort enjoyed by travelers, compared to a horse drawn wagon, is amazing. No longer do travelers have to endure the bone-jarring ordeal of riding on a stiff leather saddle or splinter-infested wagon seat. Their voyage is now made on softly cushioned seats that can be adjusted to fit the sojourners level of comfort. Travelers are no longer subjected to the harsh elements of the weather. In the past, travelers had to suffer the biting cold of winter and the blistering heat of summer, not to mention the suffering encountered by gale force winds, blinding snow, and drenching rain. Today people can enjoy a soothing and relaxing trip thanks to the totally enclosed interiors that offer air conditioning and heating units in most vehicles. Needless to say, with all the advantages an automobile has to offer, no one would dream of using the expression 'Get a horse' today.

**Exercise 4.5**

Select two topics that you wrote topic sentences for in exercise 4.4. Write five or six supporting sentences for each topic.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Chapter 7- Parts of the Essay

## Essay Organization

An essay or composition is a collection of paragraphs that cover one particular topic. The organization of an essay is essentially the same as a paragraph. It contains an introduction, just as a paragraph contains a topic sentence. The introductory paragraph lets the reader know what the essay will be about. An essay has body paragraphs, which develop the topic stated in the introduction, in the same way that supporting sentences develop the topic sentence in a paragraph. The body paragraphs, usually the longest part of the essay, contain support for the thesis statement. An essay contains a concluding paragraph, just as a paragraph contains a concluding sentence. The concluding paragraph summarizes the information in the essay or may contain the writer's opinion or prediction of the topic.

For an essay, a topic sentence and a concluding sentence may be not needed for all paragraphs. If the thesis statement contains a predictor, it will clearly show what the topic of the paragraphs will be. Even if no topic sentence is used, the writer still needs to have good transition and unity to tie the paragraphs together cohesively.

## The Introduction

There are two primary functions of the introductory paragraph: to indicate what the essay will be about and to attract the attention of the reader. The introduction may include making an initial general statement and narrowing it down to the thesis statement or explaining the importance of the topic. In addition, the introduction may provide the reader with background information, set the limits of the discussion, or to clarify the meaning of words. Without an introduction the essays begins too abruptly and may cause confusion for the reader.

If the introduction does not grab the reader, they may stop reading and seek entertainment or information elsewhere. There are several techniques that can be used in introductions to help get the attention of the reader. These are anecdotes, quotes, surprise with an unexpected view, questions, interesting facts or statistics, background or historical information, or a combination of these.

The topic of the essay is contained in the thesis statement. The thesis statement is the most important sentence in an essay, just as the topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph. The thesis statement is similar to the topic sentence and serves the same function in an essay as the topic sentences does for the paragraph. It tells what the essay is about, just as the topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about. The thesis statement is the last sentence in the introductory paragraph. It lets the reader know what will be discussed in the remaining paragraphs and expresses the opinion or point of view of the writer. It contains the same components as the topic sentence. It contains the topic, a controlling idea, and opinion. The topic is what the essay will be about. The controlling idea is what will be said about the topic. There can only be one controlling idea in the thesis statement. The thesis statement must also contain an opinion. If the thesis statement contains a fact, it cannot be supported and the writer cannot write an essay about it.



Thesis statements may also have additional characteristics. The



Thesis statements may also have additional characteristics. The thesis statement indicates the central purpose for the essay and controls the essay. It gives a plan for the essay and the essay must follow that plan. The thesis statement may indicate how many paragraphs the essay will be, the organization of the essay, and the content of each paragraph. For example, in the thesis statement *'The primary causes for the gradual collapse of the British Empire were political differences, economic factors, and geographic distance'*, one paragraph each will be devoted to explaining the three causes of the collapse: political differences, economic factors, and geographic distance. The order of the ideas presented in the body paragraphs must match the order indicated in the thesis statement. In the above example the first body paragraph must be about political differences, the second paragraph must be about economic factors, and the third must be about geographic distance.



When writing thesis statements keep in mind these simple rules:

- 1) it must be a statement, not a question
- 2) it must be complete sentence
- 3) it must be an opinion, not a fact
- 4) it must have one, and only one, a controlling idea
- 5) it must state the writer's position on the topic

### Exercise 7.1

Look at the following thesis statements. Place an X in the space provided if it is an ineffective thesis statement. If the statement is an effective thesis statement leave the space blank. If the statement is ineffective as a thesis statement, indicate in the space provided what it is lacking: **T-** lacks a topic, **CI-** lacks a controlling idea, **O-** lacks an opinion.

- Computers save time, money, and effort.
- Habitual gamblers waste resources.
- The three most common reasons for divorce are economic difficulties, incompatibility, and unfaithfulness.
- George Washington was the first president of the United States.
- Are money and religion the two main causes of war?
- Hawaii is a great vacation spot because of the sun, sand, and surf.
- There are three qualities that a good secretary must have.
- Dream interpretation is a major concern for Freudian psychologists.
- Three popular Disney characters are Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, and Winnie the Pooh.
- The only proven methods to lose weight are diet and exercise.

