

Paragraph Structure

Chapter 2 : Paragraph Structure
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Objectifs

In this chapter, the students will be able to :

- able to recognize the structure/components of a paragraph.
- able to write well-structured stand-alone paragraphs.

Introduction



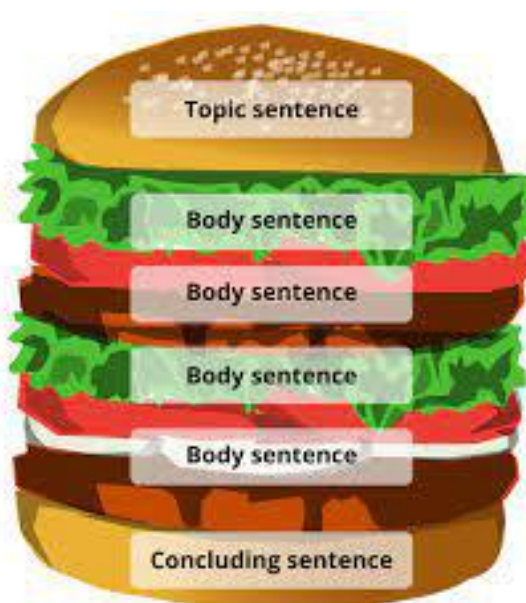
Academic writing is the type of writing that is used to craft educational content and is found in universities, colleges, and research institutions. More specifically, it is the style of writing whereby reports, essays, research papers, and scientific article etc., are written. Additionally, in some university modules, most exam questions are answered in the form of essays and paragraphs. The latter are the building blocks of virtually every written assignment produced at university targeting a scholarly audience. Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of the basic structure and integral components of a paragraph is deemed of paramount importance for our sophomores.

Paragraph Structure

I

1. Definition

Broadly speaking, a paragraph is a group of sentences about one single topic. In academic writing, a paragraph is between five to ten sentences, but a paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences. Paragraphs are marked by indenting the first word in the first sentence from the left margin. Basically, a paragraph is threefold: the topic sentence, the supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence.



Paragraph Structure

For more details about the overall structure of the paragraph, click [here](#) and watch the video.

2. Topic Sentence

The topic sentence is considered to be the most important sentence in the paragraph. It usually comes at the beginning of the paragraph, and it introduces the topic and the main idea. A good topic sentence consists of two parts: **the topic and the controlling idea (main idea)**. The topic states the subject of the paragraph, and the controlling idea limits the topic of the paragraph.

Examples

- Independence day is an important holiday in my country.

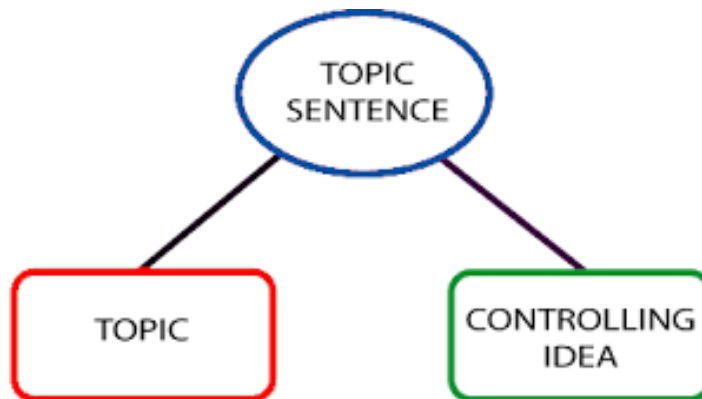
→The topic is '**independence day**', and the controlling idea is '**an important day in my country**'.

- The rise of child labour is due to many reasons.

→The topic is '**the rise of child labour**', and the controlling idea is '**many reasons**'.

- Registering for university classes can be a frustrating experience for new students.

→The topic is '**registering for university classes**', and the controlling idea is '**a frustrating experience for new students**'.



Components of a Topic Sentence

2.1. Characteristics of the Topic Sentence

a. Topic sentences are complete sentences. The sentences below are not topic sentences because they are not complete sentences:

. Independence day

. The rise of child labour

. Registering for university classes

b. A topic sentence contains both the topic and the controlling idea. It names the topic and then limits it to the specific area to be discussed in the paragraph.

. Ramadan has three important days within the month of fasting.

→Ramadan (**topic**)

→has three important days within the month of fasting(**controlling idea**).

. New York is the world's most exciting city.

→ New York (**topic**)

→ is the world's most exciting city (**controlling idea**)

c. The topic sentence is the most general statement in the paragraph. It does not give the details because the latter are stated in the supporting sentences.

→ The Arabic origin of many English words is not always obvious. (**general statement**)

d. A topic sentence is neither too general nor too specific.

→ English has been influence by many languages. (**too general**)

→ The slang expression 'so long' (meaning "good-bye") is probably a corruption of the Arabic word 'Salaam'. (**too specific**)

e. A topic sentence should state an opinion (not fact) or divide the topic into parts.

→ One of the most valuable tools for students is the computer. (**opinion**)

→ Japan has three holidays that honour family members. (**division of topic into parts**)

3. The body (Supporting Sentences)

Basically, supporting sentences explain or prove the topic sentence, usually through facts. There are several kinds of supporting details: examples, statistics, and quotations. In terms of organization, mostly in expository paragraphs, there are two types of supporting sentences: major supporting sentences and minor supporting sentences. Major supporting sentences support the topic sentences, and the minor supporting sentences tell us more about the major supporting sentence. It is worthwhile to note that all supporting sentences do not need to have the same number of minor supporting sentences. In addition, it is not always necessary to have minor supporting sentences for major supporting sentences.

3.1. Analysis of the Supporting Sentences of a Paragraph

Have a look at the paragraph below:

Golden week in Japan is a combined celebration of three holidays. The first takes place on April 29th, the birthday of Emperor Showa, and commemorates the 64 years that he was in power. It is a time for the Japanese people to remember this important period in their history. The second holiday in Golden week is Constitutional Memorial Day. This day marks the establishment of the Japanese Constitution on May 3, 1947. The next holiday, on May 4th, is called Midorino-hi and is a day for people to be outside enjoying the environment. In fact, Midorino-hi means "green day." Children's day, the fourth holiday of Golden Week, is on May 5th. The holiday celebrates the health and happiness of children. Traditionally, this day was Boy's Day, and some families still recognize this. For example, they fly flags shaped like carp outside their homes to bring strength and success to their boys. In short, Golden Week is a whole week of celebration for the Japanese people.

. Identifying the major and minor supporting sentences in the paragraph above :

- **Topic sentence**

Golden week in Japan is a combined celebration of three holidays.

- **Major supporting sentence**

The first takes place on April 29th, the birthday of Emperor Showa, and commemorates the 64 years that he was in power.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

It is a time for the Japanese people to remember this important period in their history.

- **Major supporting sentence**

The second holiday in Golden week is Constitutional Memorial Day.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

This day marks the establishment of the Japanese Constitution on May 3, 1947.

- **Major supporting sentence**

The next holiday, on May 4th, is called Midorino-hi and is a day for people to be outside enjoying the environment.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

In fact, Midorino-hi means “green day.”

- **Major supporting sentence**

Children's day, the fourth holiday of Golden Week, is on May 5th.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

The holiday celebrates the health and happiness of children.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

Traditionally, this day was Boy's Day, and some families still recognize this.

• **Minor supporting sentence**

For example, they fly flags shaped like carp outside their homes to bring strength and success to their boys.

- **Concluding sentence**

In short, Golden Week is a whole week of celebration for the Japanese people.

4. Concluding Sentence

Concluding sentences are generally needed in stand-alone paragraphs. In the main, a concluding sentence is the last piece in the jigsaw, and it is a restatement of the topic sentence, by giving the same information in a slightly different way, usually through using different words or different word order. The concluding sentence may also sum up the whole paragraph and remind the reader of the paragraph's main idea and supporting points. Concluding sentences usually, but not always, start with a transition (to sum up, to conclude, in short, in brief, etc.).



Concluding Sentence

Remarque

It is to be noted that the concluding sentence should never introduce a new point.

5. Exercice

How do we call the sentences that explain the topic sentence ?

6. Exercice

What do minor supporting sentences explain ?

- ☐ Concluding Sentence
- ☐ Topic Sentence
- ☐ Major Supporting Sentences

7. Exercice : Fill in the gaps.

1. The _____ is usually the first sentence in a paragraph. It gives the _____ and the _____.
2. The first sentence in a paragraph can be _____.
3. The _____ come after the topic sentence, and they explain the topic sentence.
4. The _____ comes at the end of a paragraph.

* *

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In academic writing, paragraphs are of great importance largely because they are the building blocks of the different written assignments (reports, essays, reports, etc.) performed in university settings for a scholarly audience. In a nutshell, a paragraph is a composite of five to ten sentences discussing one single topic. It consists of three parts: (a) the topic sentence which names the topic and gives the main idea of the paragraph, (b) the supporting sentences which support the topic sentences through details, explanation, and examples, and (c) the concluding sentence which simply brings the paragraph into a logical ending, usually by restating the topic sentence or summarizing the main points discussed in the paragraph.