PARAGRAPH WRITING

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 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, sometimes, **a concluding sentence**.

The *topic sentence* is often *(but not always)*, the first sentence in the paragraph. The topic sentence tells the reader what the main idea of the paragraph is, i.e., the topic and focus of the paragraph.

Look at the following topic sentences.

Example TS 1:   My best vacation was in the south two years ago.

The **topic** is the writer's **trip to the south**, and the **focus** is that **it was his or her best vacation**.

Example TS 2:   I am lucky because I have a wonderful family.

The **topic** is the **writer's family**, and the **focus** is **why the family members are wonderful**.

The *supporting sentences* give examples, explanation, information and opinion to support the main idea of the paragraph. Therefore, all **supporting sentences** should help the reader to understand the topic and focus of the sentence.

Look at these supporting sentences.

P1:   *We spent the first three days in Valdivia and from there we visited Frutillar and Puerto Varas. The views were amazing.*

P2:   *I love everyone in my family very much. My mum is very kind and looks after all of the family.*

All these example sentences support the main idea of the paragraph.

The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It is often like the topic sentence and reminds the reader of the topic and focus of the paragraph, but it should use different words, if possible. Here are some examples:

In Example 1: It was a fantastic vacation.
This concludes the paragraph about the writer's best vacation.

In Example 2: I guess I am lucky to have such a wonderful family.

This concludes the paragraph about the writer's family.

Topic sentences

Exercise 1 – Choose a topic sentence

Look at the supporting sentences in these short paragraphs and choose the best topic sentence.

(1) …………………………………………………… 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 winter. I really wish I could change it.

a) My car is old   b) I wish I could buy a new car   c) My car costs a lot of money.

(2) ………………………………………………… The teachers are 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) My college is too old   b) I don't like the teachers at my college   c) I really hate my college

Exercise 2 – Try it yourself.

Read each topic sentence. Circle the main idea. Underline the controlling idea. Then predict the kind of information you will find in the paragraph.

1. New York and Boston attract millions of tourists, but I think one of the best cities to visit on the east coast of the United States is Washington, D.C.

What kind of information do you think is in this paragraph?

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2. One of the people that I most admire is my great-grandmother, Carla.

What kind of information do you think is in this paragraph?
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…………………………………………………………………………

As you can see, the topic sentences are all very different. As a result, the supporting sentences that you write will depend on your topic sentence.

Exercise 3

Read the paragraphs. Notice how the supporting sentences tell you more about the topic sentence. Compare what you wrote in Exercise 2 to the information in each paragraph. How well did you predict the content?

A Great Tourist Destination

New York and Boston attract millions of tourists, but I think one of the best cities to visit on the east coast of the United States is Washington, D.C. It 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. For more excitement, the area called Georgetown in northwest Washington is famous for its shopping and restaurants. Finally, there is the White House tour. On this tour, the guide leads visitors as they walk through many of the rooms in the White House and view the home of the president of the United States. Although Washington, D.C., does not have the large number of visitors that New York or Boston does, I think this city is one of the best destinations for tourists.

a landmark: a historical building, a well-known location
a spot: a place, a location
to lead: to show the way, organize.
to view: to see, look at.

An Immigrant in the Family

One of the people that I admire the most is my great-grandmother, Carla. She went to the United States from Italy in 1911 as a young woman on a large ship. She had little money and no property. Soon after landing at Ellis Island in New York, she began working as a seamstress in Brooklyn. She met and married my great-grandfather not long after that. They immediately began their large family. Great-grandma Carla had eight children—five boys and three girls. In addition to taking care of such a large family in a new country, my great-grandmother survived discrimination as an immigrant, two world wars, the Great Depression, and a long list of illnesses. However, she rarely complained, and she was very happy with her new life in America. Whenever I think of my great-grandma Carla, I am always filled with admiration for her.

the property: land or buildings that a person owns
a seamstress: a woman who makes clothes for a living
such: to a great degree, very
to complain: to express unhappiness or dissatisfaction about something

Supporting sentences

Exercise 1 – Choose the sentences
Look at the topic sentences below and choose the best four supporting sentences from the list.

1. **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.

2. I hate my job. For one thing, _____.

Another thing is that _____. Also,_____.

However, the worst thing is that _____. I think

it's 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 must work until about nine o'clock every night.
g) our office building is old and dirty.

Kinds of Supporting Sentences: Good supporting sentences have different objectives.

● to explain: The family moved from the village to the capital for economic reasons.
● to describe: She lived in a beautiful house surrounded by a big garden.
● to give reasons: He quit his job due to the stressful working conditions.
● to give facts: More than 10% of the students are from abroad.
● to give examples: Oranges and grapefruits grow in the Aconcagua Valley.
● to define: Many tourists visit Santiago, which is the capital and largest city in Chile.

Exercise 2: Matching Supporting and Topic Sentences

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. Notice that each sentence is labeled in parentheses with the kind of supporting sentence that it is.

Topic sentences

TS 1: Low-fat diets are an excellent way to stay healthy and slim.

TS 2: High-protein diets are favored by athletes and competitors.

Supporting sentences

a. …………   These foods help build muscles and increase energy. (fact)

b. …………   They are preferred by the public because they help with weight reduction.

c. …………… Low-fat diets are recommended by most physicians. (fact)

d.……………   Many athletes eat high-protein foods, such as meat, beans, and nuts. (example)

e …………… Low-fat foods include fruits, vegetables, and pasta. (example)

f. …………… Because they are easy to find in stores, low-fat foods are convenient. (reason)

g. …………… Athletes generally eat high-protein diets to give them more energy. (reason)

h. …………… Crispy steamed vegetables and grilled fish and chicken are all tasty parts of a low-fat, heart-friendly diet. (description)

Exercise 3:

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.

Different Names for the Same Kind of Storm

When bad weather, thunder, and strong winds mix, the result is a dangerous storm, but the name for that storm differs according to where the storm occurs. When a storm forms in the Atlantic or eastern Pacific Ocean, it is called a hurricane. This type of storm can be dangerous to people living in the United States, Mexico, Central America, or the Caribbean islands. When a large storm begins in the southern Pacific Ocean, this same type of storm is called a cyclone. Cyclones are less common due to the colder temperature of the water there. Finally, if this same storm begins in the western Pacific Ocean, it is referred to as a typhoon. Typhoons are usually stronger than hurricanes, and they endanger people living in areas such as Japan, Guam, or the Philippines.
 ……

due to: because of.

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