

A paragraph is a group of sentences that develop one topic or idea. It has three main parts. The first part is the topic sentence. It is called the topic sentence because it states the topic or the subject of the paragraph. The second main part is the supporting sentences. The supporting sentences develop the topic. This means that they explain the topic sentence in detail. The last part is the concluding sentence. The concluding sentence summarises the paragraph and/or adds a final comment. A clear academic paragraph requires all of these parts.

Read and examine the sample paragraphs below and discuss their structure.

Sample Paragraph 1:

Problems in Big Cities	
(1) All around the world living in big cities creates serious problems for people. (2a) The first problem is air pollution. For example, in Istanbul, many people have cars and cars are one reason	1 THE TOPIC SENTENCE
why the air is polluted. (2b) Secondly , traffic is an important problem for the people living in big cities. Nowadays there are more and more cars on roads, and this causes traffic jams in many parts of the cities. For this reason, many inhabitants waste their time in traffic, and they are negatively affected by this situation. (3) To sum up , air pollution and traffic jams are two important problems that people living in big cities have.	2 SUPPORTING SENTENCES
	3 THE CONCLUDING SENTENCE

Sample Paragraph 2:

Bicycles are popular today in many countries for three reasons. First, most of the people use bicycles to exercise.

Topic Sentence

Supporting Sentence 1

To illustrate, in Holland, people think riding a bicycle is a better way of keeping fit and staying healthy than other sports. The second reason is money. Generally bikes are not expensive to buy, and they are quite cheap to fix.

Supporting Sentence 2

Finally, they are suitable for city life. In cities, many people prefer bikes to cars because unlike cars, with a bicycle,

Supporting Sentence 3

they never have to wait in traffic. In brief, having a bicycle is beneficial for people for different reasons.

The Concluding Sentence

Bicycles are popular today in many countries for three reasons. **First**, most of the people use bicycles to exercise. To illustrate, in Holland, people think riding a bicycle is a better way of keeping fit and staying healthy than other sports. **The second reason** is money. Generally bikes are not expensive to buy, and they are quite cheap to fix. **Finally**, they are suitable for city life. In cities, many people prefer bikes to cars because unlike cars, with a bicycle, they never have to wait in traffic. **In brief**, having a bicycle is beneficial for people for different reasons.

A. PARTS OF A PARAGRAPH

I. THE TOPIC

A topic is the general idea of a paragraph. It is what gives the answer to the question "What is the paragraph about?" For example, Biochemistry, Physiology and Anatomy are all examples of the topic Medical subjects.

Exercise 1: Circle the topic of the words below.

- | | | | | |
|------------|------------|---------|------------|---------|
| 1. Mercury | Venus | Planets | Saturn | Mars |
| 2. German | Italian | English | Languages | Spanish |
| 3. wheel | tire | car | door | seat |
| 4. apple | banana | grape | strawberry | fruit |
| 5. fan | basketball | coach | scoreboard | player |

Exercise 2: Find the topic of words below.

- | | | | | | The topic is |
|--------------|---------|--------------|----------|---|--------------|
| 1. elephants | zebras | lions | tigers | → | _____ |
| 2. modem | monitor | mouse | keyboard | → | _____ |
| 3. jazz | rock | classical | blues | → | _____ |
| 4. snowy | rainy | stormy | windy | → | _____ |
| 5. circle | oval | cube | square | → | _____ |
| 6. leak | cabbage | cauliflower | carrot | → | _____ |
| 7. John | Alex | Hans | James | → | _____ |
| 8. bedroom | kitchen | bathroom | balcony | → | _____ |
| 9. texting | e-mail | mobile phone | letter | → | _____ |
| 10. skirt | dress | tie | suit | → | _____ |

II. THE TOPIC SENTENCE

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a paragraph. It contains the main idea which is developed in the rest of the paragraph. A topic sentence must be a complete sentence, a statement of intent, opinion or a mixture of both. It should be neither too broad (Football is very popular in the world) nor too narrow (Gold is very valuable). The topic tells us the subject (what the paragraph is about) and the controlling idea makes a specific comment about the topic (what the paragraph is going to say about the topic / the writer's attitude or idea about the topic). In other words, the controlling idea shows the reader what the rest of the paragraph will say about the topic; it limits the topic to a specific area to be discussed in a single paragraph.

A topic sentence has two main parts: topic and the controlling idea.

Topic Sentence = topic + controlling idea

Caffeine has several harmful effects on health.

Topic	Controlling Idea
└──┘	
Topic Sentence	

In this example the topic is "caffeine". A specific comment is then made about the topic: "it has several harmful effects on health". From this topic sentence, the reader immediately knows that the supporting sentences will explain or prove how harmful caffeine can be.

e.g. Students who are studying abroad may face many difficulties.

Topic

Controlling Idea

e.g. There are two main advantages of working at home.

Controlling Idea

Topic

The controlling idea may be found:

- *at the beginning of the topic sentence*

There are two main advantages of working at home.
Controlling Idea Topic

- *at the beginning and at the end of the topic sentence, separated by the topic*

The two main advantages of working at home are its flexible hours and its comfort.
Controlling Idea Topic Controlling Idea

- *at the end of the topic sentence*

Working at home is advantageous because of its flexible hours and its comfort.
Topic Controlling Idea

Exercise 3: Underline the topic and the controlling idea of each topic sentence below.

1. When people divorce, children often have problems.
2. Walking is good for your heart.
3. Watching TV is a good way to learn spoken English.
4. Technology spoils the traditional way of life.
5. Nuclear power is our greatest hope for solving the energy crisis.
6. Nuclear power is the greatest threat to life on the planet.

Exercise 4: Which alternative can be the topic sentence of the paragraph below?

- a. Skiing is expensive.
- b. Skiing is a popular sport despite its disadvantages.
- c. Skiing has many disadvantages.

_____. Many people enjoy it although it is expensive and dangerous. Also, the severe cold doesn't keep skiers away from the slopes. It is clear that a lot of people spend every winter weekend skiing, and many families go on winter ski holidays regardless of these drawbacks.

Exercise 5: Write a topic sentence for the paragraph below.

_____. First of all, you must consider the quality of the university's academic program. The university's size and location should also be given a careful thought. Finally, you must always be sure to consider the tuition before you decide which university to attend. In short, a good education is important, so before choosing a university, the quality of the education given, the size, the location and the tuition should be taken into consideration.

III. SUPPORTING SENTENCES

The supporting sentences in a paragraph explain or develop the topic sentence. The supporting part can be narratives, details, facts, examples, explanations or statistics. All of the supporting sentences relate to the main idea stated in the topic sentence and show why it is true.

Exercise 6: Write a list of things that fit each of the topics below.

<u>Topic</u>				
Reading Materials	:	_____	_____	_____
Monetary Units	:	_____	_____	_____
Public Holidays	:	_____	_____	_____
Mass Media	:	_____	_____	_____

Exercise 7: Read the topic sentences below and think of suitable supporting sentences to complete each paragraph.

1. Wearing a school uniform has certain drawbacks.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. You can improve your English in several ways.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

IV. THE CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The conclusion of a paragraph signals the end of the paragraph, summarizes the main points of the paragraph and relates them to the topic sentence; it provides a final comment on the topic and leaves the reader with the most important ideas to think about; it can also make a suggestion or a prediction.

A concluding sentence is not absolutely necessary, but it is very helpful to the reader since it signals the end of the paragraph and reminds the reader of the important points. The concluding sentence often closes the paragraph by returning the main idea of it. They do this by repeating a keyword or phrase from the topic sentence.

e.g.:

Topic sentence: There are many good reasons why people live in the country but not in cities.

Conclusion : In conclusion, living in the country is much better than living in the city.

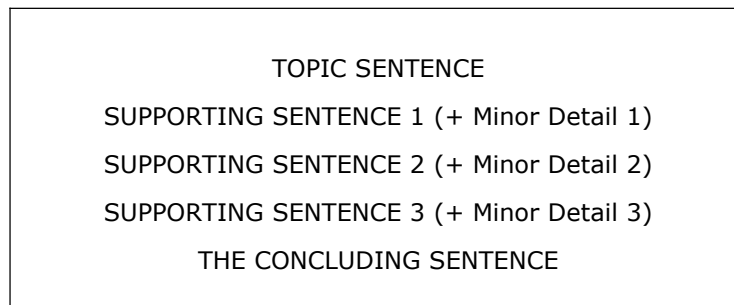
Topic Sentence: Forests are important for life on earth.

Conclusion : To sum up, if there were no forests, there would be no life on this planet.

Topic Sentence: There are some important qualities of a good boss.

Conclusion : All in all, a qualified boss should be fair, he or she should be a good leader and act consistently.

B. BASIC PARAGRAPH FORMAT



Wilma likes travelling by bus better than travelling by boat for many reasons **(TS)**. Firstly, it costs less **(SS1)**. For example, she can ride by bus from New York to Miami for \$85, but the boat trip between the two cities is \$200 **(MD1)**. In addition, travelling by bus gives her a closer look at the cities and countryside than she could get from a boat. **(SS2)** Finally, she thinks that the passengers on the bus are often closer to her own age, so they are easy to talk with. **(SS3)** In conclusion, she believes travelling by bus is an ideal form of transport for her **(CS)**.

Exercise 8:

a. These are mixed sentences of a paragraph. Put each sentence below in the correct place in the chart to form the paragraph. The topic sentence is h.

- a) Thirdly, because of financial problems, some students fail university classes.
- b) For example, students who have to take jobs don't have as much time to study, so they may fail classes.
- c) The first reason is that they fail because their academic background is weak.
- d) Finally, there are students who fail because their energies are not directed toward their classes.
- e) For example, one student might not have had enough mathematics courses at high school, so he fails his university math class.
- f) The second reason is that most students don't understand the importance of regular attendance.
- g) Others may worry because they have too little money, and they may not be able to concentrate on their studies.
- h) There are some reasons why many students fail in college.
- i) Because some students don't attend classes regularly, they may not be able to pass the tests simply because they don't know the answers.
- j) In conclusion, due to all these problems, numerous students fail in college every year.
- k) For example, some of these students are not interested in college and they spend their day doing other things.

PARAGRAPH 1	
Topic sentence	: H
Supporting idea 1	:
Minor detail 1	:
Supporting idea 2	:
Minor detail 2	:
Supporting idea 3	:
Minor detail 3	:
Minor detail 3	:
Supporting idea 4	:
Minor detail 4	:
Conclusion	:

b. These are mixed sentences of two separate paragraphs. Put each sentence below in the correct place in the chart to form the paragraphs. The topic sentences are *b* and *j*.

- a) In addition, boat trips are often cheaper than other forms of travel.
- b) The boat is a rather old fashioned way of travelling, but it has certain advantages.
- c) In conclusion, travelling by boat isn't a very enjoyable experience.
- d) Finally, boats are a safe alternative to cars and planes.
- e) Secondly, boat trips can be very unpleasant when the weather is bad or the sea is rough.
- f) Firstly, it takes much longer than other forms of travel.
- g) For example, there are fewer accidents at sea than in the air or on the roads.
- h) First of all, boats are usually more comfortable than planes or cars.
- i) Instead of sitting in your seat for the whole journey, you can go for a walk on the deck or even go shopping.
- j) Travelling by boat has its disadvantages.
- k) For example, a boat ticket usually costs less than a plane ticket.
- l) Thirdly, boat trips may be very tiring especially for old people.

PARAGRAPH 1 Advantages	PARAGRAPH 2 Disadvantages
Topic sentence : B	Topic sentence : J
Supporting idea 1 :	Supporting idea 1 :
Minor detail 1 :	Supporting idea 2 :
Supporting idea 2 :	Supporting idea 3 :
Minor detail 2 :	Conclusion :
Supporting idea 3 :	
Minor Detail 3 :	

c. Put each sentence below in the correct place to form two different paragraphs.

- a) Firstly, it is always sunny and warm all around the year.
- b) All in all, I do my worst not to do my homework.
- c) So, you can sunbathe on the beach in summer or enjoy a walk in the warmth of winter breeze.
- d) To sum up, Hawaii is an ideal place for a good holiday.
- e) For instance, whenever the phone rings or there is someone at the door, I rush to answer before anybody else in the house.
- f) Secondly, the beaches are gorgeous with soft white sand and beautiful blue water promising everyone different water sports.
- g) I also stop studying to investigate any noise I hear while studying.
- h) There in the kitchen I make myself an omelette or a cheese sandwich and eat it very slowly.
- i) I usually have several reasons to stop doing my homework.
- j) In addition, nearly all of the hotels offer cheap accommodation and various Hawaiian food, along with terrific entertainment.
- k) There are several reasons why I usually go to Hawaii on holiday.
- l) First of all, as soon as I begin to do my homework, I always start to feel hungry and go into the kitchen to eat something.
- m) While I'm studying, I try to listen to music or stop to play a game on my phone.
- n) For instance, you cannot help windsurfing or sailing. You would also enjoy swimming or building sand castles like children.

PARAGRAPH 1	PARAGRAPH 2
Topic sentence :	Topic sentence :
Supporting idea 1 :	Supporting idea 1 :
Minor detail 1 :	Minor detail 1 :
Supporting idea 2 :	Supporting idea 2 :
Minor detail 2 :	Minor detail 2 :
Supporting idea 3 :	Supporting idea 3 :
Conclusion :	Conclusion :

C. CORRECT USE OF TRANSITIONAL WORDS

When moving from one idea to the next, the change should not be too sudden. Study the following examples:

Too sudden: People who lose their temper often become irrational. A wrong person may be victimized.

Smoother : People who lose their temper often become irrational. As a result of this, a wrong person may be victimized.

To avoid sudden changes, you can use transitional words. However, you should not overuse them. You should use them only when needed for clarity.

TO SIGNAL ...	USE ...
An Addition	in addition, besides, moreover, also, furthermore
An Example	for example, for instance, to illustrate
A summary	In conclusion, in summary, in short, in brief, to sum up, to conclude, all in all, on the whole
Result	so, as a result (of this), therefore, consequently, thus
Contrast	In contrast (to), but, however, on the other hand, yet, whereas, on the contrary, nevertheless, although, even though (despite, in spite of),
Explanation	That is, namely, in other words, that is to say, to put it in a different way
Emphasis	Indeed, in fact, truly, as a matter of fact, actually
Purpose	So that, in order that, in order to, so as to

Exercise 9: Complete the chart with the suitable transitional words.

Topic sentence	
Supporting idea 1 → firstly,	
Supporting idea 2 → secondly, in addition,	
Supporting idea 3 → thirdly, also,	
Minor details → for example,	
Conclusion → in conclusion,	

Exercise 10: Read the texts below and circle the correct linking word.

● In recent years, the Internet has become a great part of our lives. More and more people have access to it and have discovered many benefits from using it.

To begin with, the Internet offers us unlimited information and knowledge on just about every topic and access to the Net is easy and fast. ¹ **In spite of this / Therefore**, schoolchildren regularly use the web to

research school projects or to browse just for fun. ² **What is more / For this reason**, people can communicate with people all over the world with a system called e-mail. Finally, they can view products from different countries and use their credit card to do their shopping from the comfort of your own home.

³ **Even though / However**, surfing the Internet is not the best way of spending all your free time. Too many hours in front of the screen can damage your eyes. Studies have ⁴ **on the other hand / also** shown that people who prefer to spend their evenings in front of their PCs tend to become antisocial. ⁵ **Besides / As a**

⁶ **result**, there are some concerns about security on the Internet **because / so** hackers can easily steal valuable personal information such as bank account numbers, etc.

⁷ In conclusion, I believe that **despite / although** their disadvantages, the Internet has certainly made life easier and, if used properly, it may make our lives better, too.