

Paragraph Structure

Words to Know

paragraph
topic sentence
supporting details
closing sentence

In the previous exercises, you have learned to combine sentences and vary your sentence beginnings. These skills will help you write better paragraphs. So what should a well written paragraph look like?

First, a **paragraph** is defined as three or more sentences that address the same subject. In other words, all the sentences are about the same idea. A good paragraph has a **topic sentence**, (also called the *main idea*) followed by sentences that support the main idea. These sentences are called **supporting details**. The word “supporting” means “helping.” Finally, the paragraph should end with a **closing sentence**, which restates the topic sentence in different words, summarizes the paragraph, or links the paragraph to the next idea being presented in the next paragraph.

A **topic sentence** is usually the first sentence of a paragraph. Topic sentences are the main idea of the paragraph and give a hint as to what the paragraph will be about. The other sentences in the paragraph give supporting details, and help to further explain the main idea. Every sentence in a paragraph should be very closely related to the topic sentence. Any sentence that does not relate to the topic of the paragraph should be removed.

Read the paragraph below. Notice that the first sentence, the topic sentence, introduces the main idea, while the other sentences in the paragraph all support this main idea.

In order to endure the requirements of boxing, you must be physically fit and well-conditioned. Since your arms will need to be used for blocking hits, it is important that you keep them strong. Your legs should be lean and toned and you should be sure that you are light on your feet so that you can keep moving. If you haven't trained your arms and legs to endure the stress and fatigue of fighting, you won't last very long in the ring.

If there are parts of the paragraph that are not related or do not support the topic sentence, they should be removed from the paragraph. Read the following

paragraph. Notice that there is one sentence in the paragraph that does not belong. This sentence has been crossed out.

There are many reasons the driving age should be raised from 16 to 18 years old. ~~My sister got her license when she was sixteen.~~ Teenagers have a reputation for being reckless and dangerous when behind the wheel. Teens have been known to pack a car full of friends, which leads them to driving faster, often without seatbelts. In fact, teens should be put on a limited permit for three years while they learn how to drive safely.

Why doesn't this sentence fit in the paragraph? The fact that the writer's sister got her license when she was sixteen does not help the writer's argument. It is just extra information. Notice that the rest of the paragraph has to do with teenaged drivers in general. By adding this specific sentence about the writer's sister, it ruins the flow of the paragraph. The paragraph would be better without this out-of-place sentence.

Directions: Read the following paragraphs. First, **cross out** any unnecessary or misplaced sentences in each paragraph. Then, in one or two sentences, **explain why you chose to cross out that particular sentence**. In other words, why didn't this sentence fit?

1. An *Eagle Scout* is a Scout with the highest ranking in the *Boy Scouts of America*. Since the award of Eagle Scout was introduced in 1911, the rank has been earned by over one million young men. Requirements for the title include earning merit badges and demonstrating service and leadership. This includes an extensive project that the Scout plans, organizes, and leads. The Girl Scouts give an equivalent badge, but it doesn't require as much time or effort.

Explanation: _____

2. Edgar Allan Poe was an American short-story writer, poet, editor, and literary critic during the Romantic period. Beethoven was one of the musicians of the Romantic era. Poe is best known for his dark tales of mystery, and is often credited with inventing the genre of detective fiction. Poe wrote the poem “Annabel Lee.”

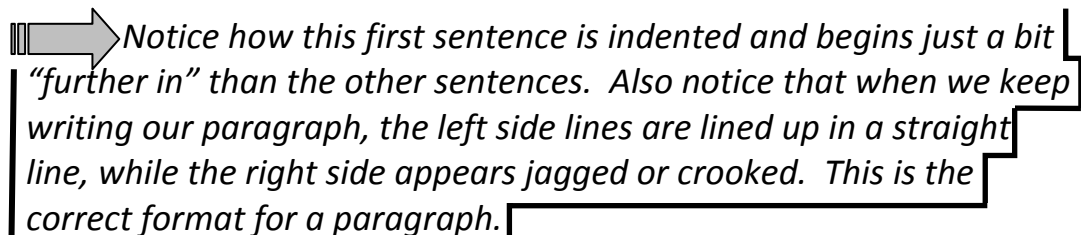
Explanation: _____

3. Captain Marvel is a fictional comic book superhero published by DC Comics. The character of Captain Marvel was created in 1939 by artist C.C. Beck and writer Bill Parker, and is the alter ego of a news reporter, Billy Batson. Hopefully, they will make a movie with Captain Marvel very soon. Whenever Billy says “Shazam,” he is instantly struck by magic and is transformed into the superhero Captain Marvel, with the abilities of six different mythical figures.

Explanation: _____

Paragraph Formatting

Remember also that there is a format to writing a paragraph. Be sure that the first line is indented. If you are typing a paragraph, you will want to space or tab the line over so that it is clear where the paragraph begins. The remainder of the lines in the paragraph should be in a straight line along the left margin. Look at the diagram below to see what a paragraph looks like on the page.



Developing Paragraph Details

Once you have become familiar with the concept of the Topic Sentence, it is necessary for you to learn how details are developed for a paragraph. Here is an example of how a paragraph is arranged:

A topic sentence, which has been indented five spaces from the left margin of your page, begins your paragraph. Supporting details continue to build on your thoughts mentioned in the topic sentence. More details build a third and possibly a fourth and fifth supporting sentence. Then finally, a last supporting sentence ends the paragraph.

Supporting details can be facts, statistics, examples, anecdotes, quotations, definitions, reasons, and/or comparisons between two or more things. To help you build a great paragraph, insert your own words into the paragraph that is missing words below.

One of my favorite places to visit is _____.

I love to go there because _____.

One of the best things about this place is _____.

When I am there, I feel _____ because I

especially like to _____.

In fact, I love visiting _____ so

much, I plan to go there _____.

While this paragraph isn't the most exciting, it is a very basic illustration of how easy it is to put a paragraph together. Note that a paragraph should have between four and six sentences.

Elements of the Paragraph

Here is a review of the elements of each sentence in a paragraph:

1. **Topic Sentence (TS):** In one sentence, tell what the paragraph will be about. Avoid using the words “this paragraph will be about...” or something similar. You don’t go up to someone and say “I am going to talk to you about...” Do you? Probably not. You just say it! That is the rule for writing, too—just say it!

Ex. Exercising regularly has many benefits.

2. **Supporting Sentence #1 (SS1):** Choose **one** aspect of the main idea to talk about. Think about the benefits of exercising regularly. How often should we exercise? What types of exercise are good for us? How do we motivate ourselves? Choose ONE of these questions to answer in Supporting Sentence #1.

Ex. Experts say that exercise helps to improve your mood by releasing a body chemical called “endorphins.”

(*Note that improving your mood is one of the *benefits of regular exercise*.)

3. **Supporting Sentence #2 (SS2):** Now, take the information you just gave and **give an example**.

Ex. Taking 30 minutes out of your day three days a week can give you more time to bond with your dog just by walking with him, and that can make you both feel better.

(*Note that time to bond, which makes both of you feel better, is another of the *benefits of regular exercise*.)

4. **Supporting Sentence #3 (SS3):** Now take the information you just gave in Supporting Sentence #2 and **give another example**.

Ex. In fact, going for a walk with your dog will not only improve your own health, but will also make your dog healthier.

(*Note, again, that walking for improved health is one more of the *benefits of regular exercise*. In Supporting Sentences 1-3 above, we have not introduced a

new idea, but we have given examples of some of the *benefits of regular exercise.*)

5. **Concluding Sentence (CS):** Now “wrap up” your sentence by **restating your topic** sentence in different words or summarizing the main idea of the paragraph.

Ex. While finding time to exercise may sometimes seem difficult, it can offer many benefits to your health.

Let’s take a look at this paragraph as a whole.

Exercising regularly has many benefits. Experts say that exercise helps to improve your mood by releasing a body chemical called “endorphins.” Taking 30 minutes out of your day three days a week can give you more time to bond with your dog just by walking with him, and that can make you both feel better. In fact, going for a walk with your dog will not only improve your own health, but will also make your dog healthier. While finding time to exercise may sometimes seem difficult, it can offer many benefits to your health.

Directions: Complete the following paragraphs by writing sentences to support the topic sentence given. Be sure that your paragraphs have four sentences in addition to the topic sentence, and that all sentences follow the guidelines given on pages 69 and 73. Once you have written all your sentences, rewrite the sentences in paragraph form on the lines provided.

- 1) Topic Sentence (TS):** In order to do well on tests, students should spend time studying before the test is given.

Supporting Sentence #1 (SS1): (Choose **one** aspect of the main idea to talk about: How much time should a student spend studying? Where should a student study? How should a student study? When should a student begin to study? Choose ONE question to answer in Supporting Sentence #1.)

Name _____ Period _____

Supporting Sentence #2 (SS2): (Now, take the information you just gave and **give an example.**)

Supporting Sentence #3 (SS3): (Now take the information you just gave in Supporting Sentence #2 and **give another example.**)

Concluding Sentence (CS): (Now “wrap up” your paragraph by **restating your topic** sentence in different words or summarizing the main idea of the paragraph.)

Now, rewrite your sentences into paragraph form below.

Name _____ Period _____

2) TS: Parents can help their child be more successful in school by allowing him or her time to get homework done.

SS1: _____

SS2: _____

SS3: _____

CS: _____

Rewrite your sentences into paragraph form below.
