

Faculté : Mathématiques et Informatique
 Département: Socle Commun Mathématique et Informatique
 Module: Written Expression Techniques
 Module Convenor: Dr Abdelhamid
 Level: 1st year



THE STRUCTURE OF A PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is a group of sentences about a single topic. Together, the sentences of the paragraph explain the writer's main idea (most important idea) about the topic. In academic writing, a paragraph is often between five and ten sentences long, but it can be longer or shorter, depending on the topic. The first sentence of a paragraph is usually indented (moved in) a few spaces.

Exercise 1

Read this paragraph. It is the beginning of an article about Switzerland in a student newspaper. Then answer the questions.

Switzerland — Something Interesting at Every Turn

By Ken Jones

If you dream of travelling to a country with beautiful mountains, delicious food, wonderful places to go sight-seeing and polite people, you should visit Switzerland. If you look at the map, the first thing you notice is that



Switzerland has many mountains, including some of the highest in Europe. Climbing or skiing down the mountains is great fun. Another thing you will notice is that Switzerland shares its borders with five different countries: France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Liechtenstein. In fact, there are four official languages in Switzerland: German, French, Italian and Romansch. All these groups of people make Swiss culture very interesting. Finally, Switzerland has many cities and interesting places to visit. Cities such as Bern have modern buildings like the Paul Klee Zentrum, yet the traditional alpine refuges in the mountains show that the country's old traditions are still alive. All the people, places and things to see definitely make Switzerland a great place for a holiday.

a. What is the topic of the paragraph?

.....

b. What is the main idea about the topic?

.....

c. What ideas help explain the main idea?

.....

- Read the paragraph about Switzerland again. Circle the topic sentence, put one line under the supporting sentences, and put two lines under the concluding sentence.

Exercise 2

Put a tick (✓) next to the group of sentences that makes a good paragraph. Why are the other groups of sentences not good paragraphs?

a.

My best friend has many different hobbies, such as skiing, cooking, and playing the piano, and she is very good at all of these activities. For example, she has played the piano for ten years and has won three piano competitions. She also likes to spend time travelling, and she has been to many different countries in the world. She grew up speaking Spanish and English, but now she can also speak French and Italian. I like my best friend very much.

b.

Classes in literature are useful no matter what job you intend to have when you finish university. Books are about life. People who study literature learn the skill of reading carefully and understanding characters, situations, and relationships. This kind of understanding can be useful to teachers and business people alike. Literature classes also require a lot of writing, so they help students develop the skill of clear communication. Of course, a professional writer needs to have this skill, but it is an equally important skill for an engineer. Finally, reading literature helps develop an understanding of many different points of view. Reading a novel by a Russian author, for example, will help a reader learn more about Russian culture. For anyone whose job may bring them into contact with Russian colleagues, this insight can help encourage better cross-cultural understanding. Studying literature is studying life, so it is relevant to almost any job you can think of.

c.

One good way to learn another language is to live in a country where that language is used. When you live in another country, the language is around you all the time, so you can learn to listen to and speak it more easily.

Topic and Main Idea

The topic sentence . . .

- Usually come s first in a paragraph.
- Gives the writer's main idea or opinion about the topic and helps the reader understand what the paragraph is going to talk about.

Exercise 3

Circle the topic of the sentence. Underline the main idea about the topic.

- Switzerland is a very interesting country to visit.
- Dogs make excellent pets.

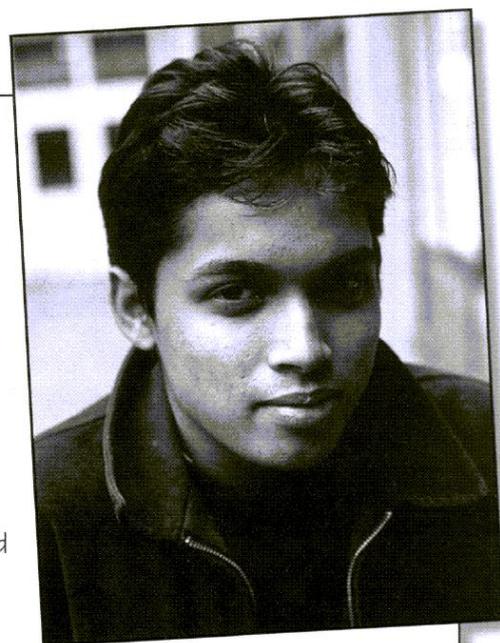
- c. A really good place to study is the library at my school.
- d. Learning a foreign language creates job opportunities.
- e. Football is my favourite sport because it is exciting to watch.
- f. One of the most valuable tools for students is the computer.
- g. My sister and I have very different personalities.
- h. Summer is the best time to travel in my country.
- i. My hometown is a friendly place to live.

Exercise 4

For each of these paragraphs, choose the sentence from the list below that would make the best topic sentence.

a.

.....
 When Ken wanted to enter a good university, he studied hard to pass the examination. The first time he took the exam, he did not do well, and he felt very discouraged. But he knew he wanted to study at that university, so he studied more. The next year, he tried taking the exam again. The second time, he did very well, and now he is studying engineering. I believe Ken is a good role model for me, and he has taught me that never giving up is the best way to succeed.



1. One of my closest friends, named Ken, is a person I can trust.
2. My friend Ken is a very successful student.

3. I admire my friend Ken because he doesn't give up.

b.

..... Many children begin learning to play football when they are very young. You can often see them playing at school or in the streets around their houses. At secondary school, students may play football in a team and compete in championships. If a player is very good, he might go on to play for a professional team. People in my country love watching football on television and also go to matches whenever they can. Many people have a favourite team or player, and everyone loves to talk about matches and competitions. Football is really like a national sport in my country.



1. I love playing football, and I hope I can become a professional player one day.
2. There are many popular sports in my country, but the most popular sport is football.
3. Football is a difficult sport to learn to play well.

Exercise 5

Write a topic sentence for three of these topics.

- a. a favourite place to relax
- b. a grandparent
- c. a pet I have known
- d. a favourite food to eat
- e. playing a musical instrument

Topic:

.....

Topic:

.....
.....

Topic:

.....
.....

The Development of a Paragraph

After you have chosen a topic and written a topic sentence, you develop your main idea by adding more information to explain what you mean through three common ways which are giving details, giving an explanation, and giving an example.

Exercise 6

Details

Read this brochure from a health club. Notice the details that help develop the paragraph. Underline the topic sentence and list the details used to support it.

ATLAS HEALTH CENTRE

You'll love working out at the Atlas Health Centre, and you'll love what it does for you! We have state-of-the-art exercise equipment in large, air-conditioned rooms. You can work out alone or with the help of one of our professional personal trainers. If you like exercising with friends, join an aerobics or swimming class — or even try kickboxing! Our staff nutrition experts are always on hand to talk with you about health issues. When you've finished, you can relax with a whirlpool bath or a sauna. Come and exercise with us at Atlas, and you'll soon be feeling strong and looking good.

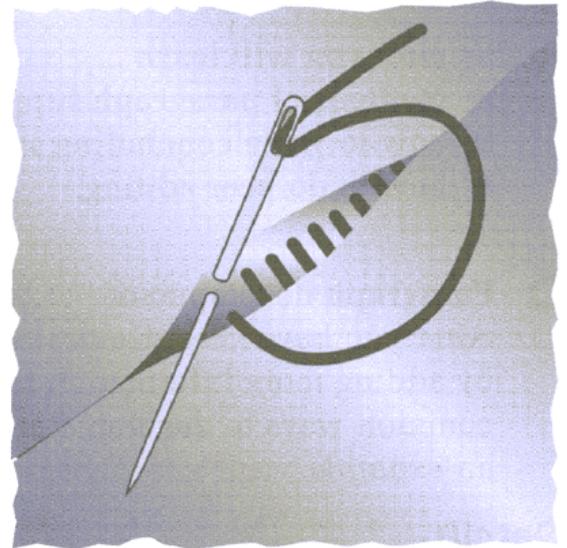
- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

f.

Explanation

An explanation tells the reader what something means or how something works. In this paragraph, underline the topic sentence. Then answer the questions.

'A stitch in time saves nine.' My mother, who likes sewing, used this simple saying to teach me the value of working on problems when they are still small. Originally, the saying referred to sewing—if you have a small hole in a shirt, you can repair it with one stitch. But if you wait, the hole will get larger, and it will take you nine stitches. This simple sentence reminds me to take care of small problems before they become big problems.



a. What is the writer trying to explain?

b. Is she successful? Do you understand the explanation? yes / no

Example

An example is a specific person, place, thing, or event that supports an idea or statement. This paragraph includes an example from the writer's own experience. Underline the topic sentence.

Dogs may enjoy prolonged petting, but cats, on the other hand, may tire of too much attention. For example, my German Shepard can lay on my lap for hours with me rubbing her head. However, my Persian cat has a small window of enjoying petting before biting my hand or running away.

Exercise 7

Would you develop each of these topics with details, an explanation, or an example?

- a. what freedom means to me
- b. an unusual holiday
- c. weddings in my country
- d. why I don't like swimming
- e. the ideal job

Concluding Sentences

The final sentence of a paragraph is called the concluding sentence. It sums up the main points or restates the main idea in a different way. A sentence that sums up the paragraph reminds the reader of what the writer's main idea and supporting points were. A sentence that restates the main idea should give the same information in a slightly different way, perhaps by using different words or by using different word order. A concluding sentence should not introduce a new point.

Exercise 8

Read these paragraphs. Is the main idea developed by details, an explanation, or an example? Is there a concluding sentence? Circle yes or no. If there is no concluding sentence, write one with your partner.

Even simple study habits can improve your marks. At university I learned how important it is to get enough sleep. When you are well-rested, it is easier to learn. Research shows that when people don't get enough sleep, their memories aren't as effective. If students are really tired, they might even fall asleep in class! It's easy to see how getting enough sleep can improve your performance at university.

- a. Means of support:
- Concluding sentence: Yes / No
-

My favourite subject is psychology. I enjoy learning about the ways people think and behave. I am also interested in learning about the way children's minds develop.

- b. Means of support:
- Concluding sentence: Yes / No
-

I am too nervous to sing karaoke songs with my friends. The last time I tried was on my birthday, when my friends took me to a karaoke club. I told my friends I didn't want to sing, but they encouraged me until I said yes. When I stood up in front of the microphone, I was so scared, I felt dizzy. It was hard to hear the music, and my mouth was too dry to make a sound. I just stood there until a friend jumped up next to me and finished the song.

- c. Means of support:
- Concluding sentence: Yes / No
-

I will never eat dinner at The Little French Bistro again. The restaurant is not very clean. You can see dust in the corners and on the shelves. The food is expensive, but the portions are small. I never feel full after I've finished eating. In addition, the waiters are not very friendly. For these reasons, I will not visit that restaurant again.



- d. Means of support:
- Concluding sentence: Yes / No
-

For me, a friend is someone who accepts you the way you are. A friend doesn't want you to change your personality or your style. I like people who don't care if the people they are with are wearing popular clothes or listening to trendy music.

- e. Means of support:
- Concluding sentence: Yes / No

.....

REVIEW

- These sentences are mixed up parts of one paragraph. Number the parts in order: 1. topic sentence, 2. supporting sentences, and 3. concluding sentence.

What should I study at university?

- a. *It wasn't an easy decision, but for the reasons listed above, I have decided to study journalism.*
- b. *It can be difficult to choose a subject to study at university because there are so many choices, but by considering my skills and interests, I have decided to study journalism.*
- c. *I have always enjoyed writing, so it is sensible to choose a subject that involves writing. When I begin working, I would like to have the opportunity to travel, and travel is often an important part of a journalist's job. Finally, I am also interested in photography, and pictures are very important in journalism.*

- Use words or phrases in the box to complete the sentences.

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------|----------------|-----------|
| concluding sentence | indented | main idea | paragraph |
| supporting sentences | topic | topic sentence | |

- a. The is usually the first sentence in a It gives the and the
- b. The first sentence of a paragraph can be
- c. The come after the topic sentence, and they explain the topic sentence.
- d. The comes at the end of a paragraph.