

Writing Handout 04 - Paragraphs and Supporting Sentences

What is an English paragraph? A paragraph is a group of sentences (usually about 6-12 sentences) that talks about one idea. The main sentence in the paragraph is called the **topic sentence**. All of the sentences that follow it support the topic sentence. When a writer wants to write about a new topic, he or she begins a new paragraph.

A paragraph can give information, tell an opinion, explain something, or even tell a short story. The sentences are arranged logically so the reader can easily understand what the writer wants to say.

In academic writing, a paragraph has a topic sentence that directly tells the reader the main idea. The other sentences in the paragraph give more information about the topic. In other words, they *support* the topic. They add specific details and explanations. The other sentences in the paragraph, called supporting sentences, give more information about the topic. In academic English, the topic sentence is usually (but not always!) first or last.

▲ Practice 1 ▼

Read the following sentences. Put a ✓ next to the sentences that support this sentence: **Naomi is one of the busiest students at school.** Put an X next to the sentences that are not related to it.

- _____ 1. She wakes up early every morning to work at the convenience store next to the station.
- _____ 2. She has long black hair.
- _____ 3. Every day at five o'clock she baby-sits her little brother until her mother gets home from work.
- _____ 4. She goes to English conversation lessons several times a week.
- _____ 5. Most people like her because she is friendly.
- _____ 6. Her mother is very busy, too.
- _____ 7. She is a volunteer teaching Japanese to children who come from abroad.
- _____ 8. Naomi's boyfriend drives a delivery truck all day.
- _____ 9. She just passed the second level of the Eiken test.
- _____ 10. She is active in her tennis club.

▲ Practice 2 ▼

Write down the supporting sentences to make a paragraph.

<p>Naomi is one of the busiest students at school. First of all, _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____. In conclusion, it is certain that no one else is as busy as Naomi.</p>

Once you decide on a topic to write about and you have a topic sentence, you must make sure that you can support that topic sentence.

In the following example, a student had to write about the topic “A good pet.” The student did all the necessary prewriting and decided upon the following information on the pet of her choice: goldfish.

Topic **Goldfish make the best pets for three reasons.**

Sentence:

- (A) **Goldfish are quiet.**
 - 1. **They do not bark or meow.**
 - 2. **They do not make noise at night when you try to sleep.**
- (B) **They are economical.**
 - 1. **One goldfish and one goldfish bowl costs less than lunch.**
 - 2. **Water for the goldfish is almost free.**
 - 3. **They only eat a little fish food each day, so their food bill is low.**
- (C) **Goldfish are very well behaved.**
 - 1. **They have no teeth, so they cannot chew furniture or bite guests.**
 - 2. **They do not go outside and dig holes in your yard.**
 - 3. **You do not have to spend hours training them to “sit” or “speak.”**

Concluding **In conclusion, if you want a quiet and economical pet that does not cause**
Sentence: **any trouble, visit your nearest pet store and buy a goldfish.**

Did the student support her choice of goldfish as a good pet? YES! Notice how the student's topic sentence says that goldfish make great pets for three reasons. (A), (B), and (C) present those reasons, which support the topic sentence. The student was also able to support those reasons with details. For instance, of course goldfish are quiet, but how are they quiet? How is that good?

▲ Practice 3 ▼

Circle the letters of the strong paragraphs. If a weak paragraph, say why.

–A–

If you need a good place to study, go to the library. It's always quiet there, so people can concentrate. It's easy to find the books you need, and you can search for information on the Internet because there are several computers. The other people in the library are also reading or working, so the mood is good for studying. Many people study better and faster in the library than in any other place.

–B–

I need to buy a motorcycle. With a motorcycle, I could get to my job more quickly. It takes two hours to get to work by train. That's very slow. A motorcycle is much faster. If I had a motorcycle, I could save a lot of time. Taking the train is not fast enough for me.

–C–

First, crack an egg over a frying pan. After that, turn on the stove to a medium setting. After about a minute, turn the egg over with a spatula. Wait another minute, turn off the heat, and move the egg from the pan to your plate. That's all!

–D–

Cell phones are very popular. They are really convenient. They're small and light.

–E–

Sports instructor is a good part-time job. You can enjoy your favorite activity and earn money at the same time. Some other jobs pay better. You can also volunteer as an instructor. Some people might have a difficult time learning to swim if their instructor is not very good. Finding a new instructor might be a good idea for them. If you get a lot of experience as a sports instructor, you can get a job at a gym or as a coach in the future.

▲▲▲ You are going to read a paragraph called *High School No-No*. What do you think the paragraph is about? Circle the answer.

- a. Useful high school subjects
- b. Working and studying at the same time
- c. How much money a part-time job pays

Read the paragraph. Did you choose the right answer above?

High School No-No

¹¹High school students should not have part-time jobs. ¹²High school is a very important time for a student, and students are very busy. ¹³Students have to study hard to enter a good university. ¹⁴Many high school students also play sports, and they practice before and after school. ¹⁵High school students also spend time with friends. ¹⁶Those friendships can be important for the rest of their lives. ¹⁷A part-time job takes time away from studying, playing sports, and making friends. ¹⁸People work most of their adult lives. ¹⁹In conclusion, when they are in high school, it is important for students to just be high school students.

Which sentence tells the writer's most important idea? _____

What do sentences 3, 4, and 5 do?

Do you agree with the writer? Why / Why not?