

# Paragraph Development

A paragraph is a group of related sentences that are centered on a main idea. The purpose of a paragraph varies according to the type of writing, but generally, a paragraph is used to develop an idea or give evidence in support of the essay's central thesis or argument. Paragraphs generally consist of three parts: topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences.

## Topic Sentence: Topic + Controlling Idea

Generally, the topic sentence is the first (or second) sentence of your paragraph, and it contains the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence should be specific and tell the reader *exactly* what the paragraph will be about. A well-structured topic sentence is made up of a topic and a controlling idea.

Example:

TOPIC                      CONTROLLING IDEA  
Ethnic foods are becoming more popular in the United States.

CONTROLLING IDEA                      TOPIC  
Immigrants have contributed many delicious foods to U. S. cuisine.

## Supporting Sentences

Each supporting sentence should contribute to the main idea. Supporting sentences help explain or prove the topic sentence, and they may include quotations or paraphrasing of source information with proper citations.

Example:

TOPIC SENTENCE  
Ethnic foods are becoming more popular in the United States. *Some researchers believe this is due to the high rate of immigration and a growing diversity in U. S. culture. Additionally, Americans are spending more and more on foreign cuisine each year, as sales of ethnic foods are increasing at an exponential rate. In fact, according to Harris (2009), sales are expected to reach an all-time high of \$5.9 billion by 2013. This rapid growth in sales shows that Americans have a continuing interest in exploring their eating options.* It is clear that ethnic foods will be an increasing part of our diet for the coming years.

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

## Concluding Sentences

Concluding sentences close the paragraph and often remind the reader of the main point. Note: this is not simply a restatement of the topic sentence. In the above example, the final sentence functions as a concluding sentence because it restates the main idea in a different way and signals the end of the paragraph.

## Constructing Effective Paragraphs: Unity and Coherence

*Unity:* Each paragraph should contain one, and only one, main idea. Including unrelated ideas within one paragraph leaves little room for adequate discussion or explanation and may cause your ideas to seem jumbled or unclear, thus confusing your reader. If there is more than one idea in a paragraph, separate the ideas into different paragraphs and try to elaborate on each.

Example:

As ethnic foods from cultures around the world continue to grow more popular in the United States, small businesses in cities large and small are thriving. Although the majority of these small businesses are restaurants, many business owners have also found success owning specialty grocery stores. These stores provide authentic ingredients to business owners as well as individuals who cook ethnic foods within their own homes. Consequently, many of these specialty stores have become very successful small businesses.

This paragraph does a successful job staying focused on a single idea: small businesses are thriving as ethnic foods continue to grow more popular. Each sentence contributes to this main idea, developing it through details.

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*Coherence:* Each sentence in a paragraph should fit logically within that paragraph and writers should use transitions to help link the ideas and guide the reader through the text easily. In other words, one sentence should lead logically to the next. This is most easily accomplished through the use of transition words (*see Common Transitions table below*).

Example: In addition to the growth of small businesses, at-home cooking of ethnic foods is also steadily increasing. For example, Meszaros (2012) points out that 87% of survey respondents in 2011 prepared ethnic foods at home, as compared with 84% in 2010. This slight increase indicates the continued growth of this market and suggests that Americans are becoming more diversified in the foods they consume, both at home and in restaurants. As a result, many grocery stores are expanding their options to include more ethnic foods and ingredients.

This paragraph begins with a transition word that links it to the previous paragraph (the example above). Throughout the paragraph, the author provides transition words to make logical connections between sentences and guide the reader through the text.

## Common Transitions

<b>To show addition</b>	and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, next, too, first, second
<b>To give examples</b>	for example, for instance, to illustrate, in fact
<b>To compare</b>	also, in the same manner, similarly, likewise
<b>To contrast</b>	but, however, in contrast, nevertheless, even though, on the contrary, yet, although
<b>To summarize or conclude</b>	in short, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up, therefore
<b>To show time</b>	after, before, next, during, later, finally, meanwhile, then, when, while, immediately
<b>To show place or direction</b>	above, below, beyond, nearby, opposite, close, to the left
<b>To indicate logical relationship</b>	if, so, therefore, consequently, thus, as a result, for this reason, because, since

*Table compiled from Hacker & Sommers, 2008, p. 65*

The information for this handout was compiled from the following source:

Hacker, D., & Sommers, N. (2008). *Rules for writers* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2006). *Writing academic English* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

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