

Lecture 1: introduction to paragraph writing.

1. Understanding paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop one main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences. The number of sentences is unimportant; however, the paragraph should be long enough to develop the main idea clearly. A paragraph may stand by itself or be one part of a longer piece of writing such as an essay or a book. In English paragraphs, the first word should be indented. That is, the first sentence of every paragraph is preceded by a TAB space. In addition, paragraphs are not separated by a line space; your new paragraph can begin on the line directly below the preceding one, but it must be indented.

2. Organising paragraphs

2.1. Structure of a paragraph

A paragraph has three main parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

- A. The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph (the focus of the paragraph). It names the topic of the paragraph and limits the topic to one specific area that can be fully discussed in the space of a single paragraph. The part of the topic sentence that announces the specific area to be discussed is called the controlling idea.

Keep in mind that:

- A topic sentence must be a complete sentence; that is, it contains at least one subject and one verb.
- A topic sentence should be neither too general nor too specific. It does not give any specific details, only the main idea.
- A topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea.
- A topic sentence should not have an unrelated controlling idea.
- A topic sentence is usually (but not always) the first sentence in a paragraph.

Examples of good topic sentences include:

1. Convenience foods are easy to prepare.
2. Immigrants have contributed many delicious foods to U.S. cuisine.
3. People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon.
4. Using a cell phone while driving can be dangerous.

Task: Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following sentences.

1. Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.
2. Owning an automobile is a necessity for me.
3. A major problem for many students in UK is the high cost of tuition and books.
4. Taste and appearance are both important in Japanese cuisine.

B. Supporting sentences develop the topic sentence. In other words, they explain the topic sentence by providing more information about it. The supporting sentences include reasons, examples, facts, statistics and quotations.

There are two types of supporting sentences: explanatory and illustrative.

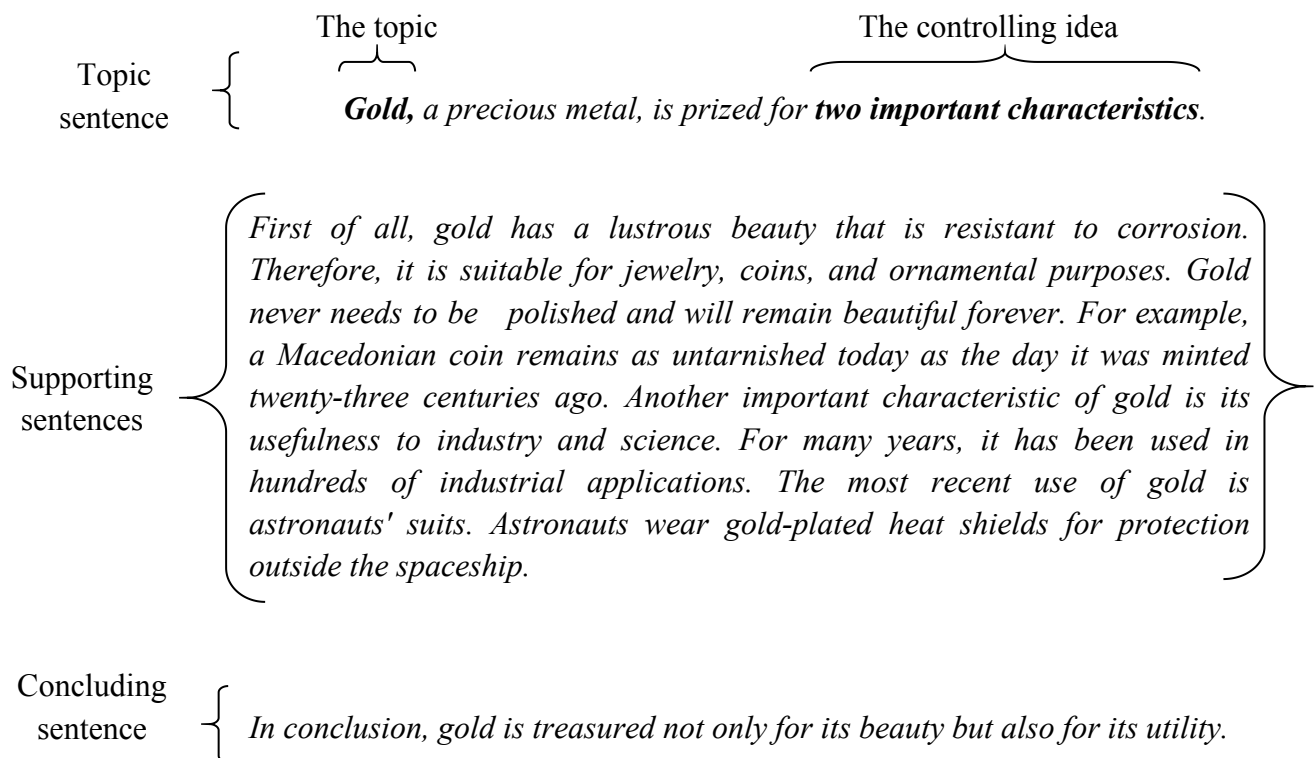
- Supporting explanatory sentences add more information about the topic as an attempt to explain more.
- Supporting explanatory illustrative sentences give examples to illustrate previous information.

C. The concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember. It can do this in three ways:

- By summarising the main points of the paragraph
 - By restating the topic sentence in different words
- Or
- By forming a judgement

A paragraph does not always need a concluding sentence. For single paragraphs, especially long ones, a concluding sentence is helpful to the reader because it is a reminder of the important points. However, a concluding sentence is not needed for every paragraph in a multiparagraph essay.

The following model text contains all the elements of a good paragraph:



N.B. the paragraph is written as one block with the first line indented; we have separated the three parts as a way to illustrate its structure.