

TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

When considering the type of paragraph you are about to write, you need to consider a few different questions. What is the purpose of the paragraph? What are you trying to communicate to your reader? The answers to these questions will guide you as you consider both the **content** of your paragraph and the **effect** you are trying to achieve. There are many different types of paragraphs. Each type has a different purpose, and writers make use of different means in achieving each purpose. The following is a list of some of the paragraph types.

Types of Paragraphs

1. **Descriptive paragraph**
2. **Narrative paragraph**
3. **Persuasive paragraph**
4. **Explanatory paragraph**

1. Descriptive Paragraph

A descriptive paragraph is one that is describing a person, place, thing, animal, theme or idea to the reader. Descriptive phrases make use of the five senses: how something feels, smells, sounds, tastes or looks. The more descriptive that you can get, the better picture you're providing your reader. A good descriptive paragraph will make them feel like they were there experiencing everything you're talking about. Descriptive paragraphs are powerful tools for fiction writers, as these paragraphs are responsible for setting the stage and telling the story.

Sample Descriptive paragraph:

Watson and the Shark is a painting by John Singleton Copley. In the foreground of the painting, one naked man is being attacked by a huge gray shark in the cold and choppy seawater. One small overloaded rowboat is near the naked man and the frightening shark. There are nine horrified men in this rowboat. They are trying to rescue the naked man. One young man takes a long spear and wants to kill the shark. Some people are reaching for his hand, and some are throwing a rope for him to catch. In the background of the painting, under the dark and cloudy sky, there are many ships stopping in the stormy harbor. The whole painting makes people feel tension and fear.

2. Narrative Paragraph

A narrative paragraph helps tell the story and keeps the story moving. Narrative paragraphs will include action, events and exciting descriptive words. These paragraphs help keep the reader engaged in the story. Narrative paragraphs are similar to descriptive paragraphs (and a paragraph may actually be both at once), but a narrative paragraph tends to offer the reader more background information, such as past events that lead up to or cause events in the story. These are also very important paragraphs for fiction writers, as they help the reader to see the whole picture.

Sample Narrative Paragraph

This past weekend I had the time of my life. First, Friday night, I had my best friend over and we made a delicious, mouth-watering pizza. After we ate, we had a friendly video game competition. On Saturday, my dad took us out on the boat. The weather was perfect and the water was warm. It was a great day to go for a swim. Later that night, we went to the movies. We saw an action packed thriller and ate a lot of popcorn. Finally, on Sunday, we rode our bikes all over town. By the end of the day, my legs were very tired. I only hope that next weekend can be as fun as this one.

3. Persuasive Paragraphs

A persuasive paragraph is one in which the writer is actually giving his own opinion on a certain subject or topic. Persuasive paragraphs will also include facts and information that help to back up the writer's opinion. These paragraphs often show up in speeches or editorial essays and other forms of writing where the main goal is persuasion. In fiction, use these paragraphs to convince the reader to feel a certain way toward a character, place or event, perhaps a different way than they may have felt earlier in the story.

Sample Persuasive Paragraph:

The best vacation is a trip to the beach. There is a lot to do at the beach. You can go swimming, build a sandcastle, or maybe even go surfing. The beach is very relaxing. Many people enjoy listening to the sound of the ocean and lying in the sun. When you plan your next vacation, be sure to remember that the beach is your best choice.

4. Explanatory Paragraph

An explanatory paragraph offers the reader information on a certain subject. These paragraphs may contain directions or might describe a process in a logical, linear manner. Explanatory paragraphs are also factual in nature and are not a common tool for fiction writers. A how-to article is an example of a piece of writing that would use these paragraphs.

Sample Explanatory Paragraph

Pat Mora's poem, "Echoes," vividly describes the meaning and mood of the poem by using sensory images. At the beginning of the poem it was talking about white wine and cool dresses which give you a feel of upper class elegance. Yet when it went from the white wine to the white uniform it changed the class of the hostess and the maid. When it mentioned that the maid's smile wavered when the speaker started to talk to her, it showed the level of amazement that the maid felt. However, the end, when it talks about hearing the cruel comment of "just drop the cups and plates / on the grass," it gave the poem a feeling of darkness as the poem told how the speaker stood in silence which describes her contradicting feelings. Towards the end of the poem the roar and flash help the reader envision the speaker's rage for the cruelty that is being calmed in a racist society.

Topic Sentences

The topic sentence is the first sentence in a paragraph. Its job is to introduce the main ideas of a paragraph.

A topic sentence is a sentence that introduces a paragraph by presenting the one topic that will be the focus of that paragraph.

The structure of a paragraph should imitate the organization of a paper. Just like the thesis statement gives the main idea of the paper at the essay level, the topic sentence gives the main idea at the paragraph level. The rest of the paragraph then supports that topic.

Topic sentences should:

- Be specific and have a narrower focus than your thesis statement.
- Appear in or near the first sentence of the paragraph.
- Introduce the topic of the paragraph.

The Topic Sentence

The "topic sentence" is the sentence in which the main idea of the paragraph is stated. It is unquestionably the most important sentence in the paragraph. The topic sentence generally is composed of two parts: (a) the topic itself and (b) the controlling idea.

The Topic

The topic is the subject of the paragraph. It is what the paragraph is all about. The following are topics suitable for a paragraph:

The SLR camera
Vegetarianism
Tokyo
Pottery
A wedding cake

Writing effective topic sentences, however, involves more than merely stating the subject of the paragraph. A good topic sentence is specific and well focused, guiding the entire paragraph. A good topic sentence:

Has new information. It is not a fact that everyone already knows to be true (for example, **A dictionary has meanings for words.**).

Is specific. If the topic is too general (for example, **I like camping.**), the reader will not know what to expect in the paragraph.

Is general enough to invite exploration of the topic. If the topic sentence is too specific (for example, **Webster's New World Dictionary has more than 40,000 words.**), there will be nothing else to say on the subject.

Is strong. Starting a topic sentence with **there is/are** (as in **There are several ways to cook rice.**) is a weak opener.

Is stated in positive language. Negative language (for example, **You might hate to do it, but you should keep your room clean.**) should not be part of the topic sentence.

Is not an announcement. A topic sentence should draw the reader into the paragraph. Announcements (like **This paragraph will discuss how to build a bird house.**) hold little attraction for readers.

The Controlling Idea

Even if all of the above conditions for a topic sentence are met, an effective topic sentence needs one additional element, the "controlling idea." The controlling idea is the point of the paragraph. It guides the ideas that provide support for the paragraph and limits the scope of the paragraph. Here is an example of a topic sentence with a controlling idea that guides the support for the paragraph:

Running provides many healthful benefits.

The topic of this topic sentence is **running**. The controlling idea is **healthful benefits**. That is, the reader knows from this sentence that the paragraph is generally about running. And the reader also knows that the point of the paragraph will be to enumerate the healthful benefits of running. Limiting the scope of the paragraph through the controlling idea may happen in one of two ways.

1. The controlling idea may reveal the writer's opinion, point of view, or attitude toward the subject of the paragraph, which automatically will set parameters for discussion of the topic. OR...
2. The controlling idea itself may provide specific limitation. In either case, this limited scope, then, serves to unify the paragraph, since any discussion must be within the parameters of the controlling idea.

Here is an example of a topic sentence with a controlling idea that states the writer's opinion-the first way to limit the scope of the paragraph:

The basics of using an SLR camera can be mastered with considerable practice.

The topic of this sentence is **an SLR camera**. The controlling idea is **mastered with considerable practice**. From this single sentence the reader knows that the topic of the paragraph is the SLR camera and that the paragraph will discuss mastering the basics of using this camera. Additionally, the reader knows that such mastery comes with practice, the writer's opinion or perspective.

Here is an example of a topic sentence with a controlling idea that specifically sets limitations for the scope of the paragraph.

When writing a laboratory report, you must complete four sections.

The topic of this sentence is a **laboratory report**. In this sentence, the controlling idea specifically states the limitation-**four sections**. Thus, the reader can predict that the writer will list and describe the four sections in order.

Concluding Sentence

A concluding sentence is used to signal that your paragraph is coming to an end. Writing a concluding sentence can be more difficult than you realize. Failing to realize that it is used to close the final thoughts on a subject is a common mistake many writers make. For any piece of writing to be effective, there has to be definitive and conclusive concluding sentences. A concluding sentence should be a summary of the previous discussion and not include any new information. The reader should be able to identify the key points in a text by reading the concluding sentence.

It's best to provide students with a few example sentences when you are teaching them about this aspect of [paper writing](#). These examples will act as a guide when they are creating their own text.

Examples of concluding sentence starters are:

- Therefore
- Overall
- In conclusion
- Thus
- As a Result
- For this reason
- In general
- Finally
- Lastly

These are known as transitional phrases, and they help the reader understand that you are reference something from your paragraph or finishing a paragraph. One thing you should never do is announce your concluding sentence.

Example of a bad announcement: - This paragraph highlights the research that supports making marijuana legal.

Instead, use a transitional phrase, and summarize: - Therefore, it would be better for patients that are in discomfort if marijuana was decriminalized.
