

How to write a paragraph

There are so many ways of developing an idea and forming a paragraph. I generally start teaching writing with introduction of the idea of writing an essay in just one paragraph. This would further help you understand the properties of a 'coherent' paragraph with specific ideas, with unity and with a well-developed and well-supported idea. In each section of the following text, I try to introduce one of the properties of a 'good' paragraph and elaborate on the importance of each.

The general format for a paragraph is thought to consist of 5 units:

1. Topic sentence (containing the main idea)
2. Supporting idea 1
3. Supporting idea 2
4. Supporting idea 3
5. Reworded topic sentence (serving as the summary)

Each of these units has some properties, which will contribute to the construction of a well-written paragraph.

Topic Sentence

Properties:

1. Limited Subject: When we start writing about an idea, this needs to be 'sufficiently limited' so that we would not sound like we are repeating facts or explaining what is obvious. As an example, if we decide to write a paragraph about 'global warming', this is inevitably going to be too general; it would be a 'primary-school-level' composition unless we make our subject more limited. Example:

Global warming is a very serious problem these days. First, ocean levels are raising too quickly due to melting ice in the north and south poles. Besides, there will be an increase in the frequency and severity of some extreme weather events. The oceans are also becoming more acidic and this will hugely change the ecological balance in the world. In other words, the change in temperature resulting from human activities, must be taken more seriously.

Does this paragraph sound sufficiently good to you? For me, it doesn't! To develop a better paragraph, what I could do is to limit my subject to something like:

Global warming has exacerbated exponentially in the last 2 years, OR
It's high time we stopped moaning about the consequences of global warming, and started addressing the causes.

2. Precise Opinion: To have an essay, we need an opinion. This opinion also needs to be precise; otherwise, it would again sound explaining the obvious or even worse – ‘a primary-school-level’ composition.

N.B. No Lie, No fact (but opinion)

After this stage, we now have the basic elements of a good topic sentence: a limited enough subject and a sufficiently precise opinion about it. What I suggest you do next, is to make the simplest sentence possible by connecting your subject with your opinion:

Limited Subject is Precise Opinion

At a later stage, you will see how we can change this simple sentence into more complex forms by changing grammar and vocabulary elements.

Supporting Idea

Supporting ideas could include a range of ideas, but the most common are logical reasoning (your arguments) and examples. There are others such as:

1. Logical Reasoning
2. Examples
3. Statistics
4. Statement by Authorities
5. Proverb
6. Quotations
7. Invented Support

Now, the question is how to come up with these arguments. There are a few techniques but the one that I recommend is a quick brainstorming of the idea using ‘Wh questions’. Then grouping the ideas and arranging the paragraphs out of them.

How to find ideas: (Techniques)

1. Wh questioning
2. Brainstorming

Obviously, these are easier to say and harder to do! Anyway, I will explain more as we go on. Just bear with me and keep calm!

Example:

Parents are the best teachers. Do you agree or disagree?

Topic Sentence → Mothers are an indispensable part of preschool education.

Brainstorming



First teachers

Only teachers

More time

Dedication

Actions speak louder than words

Character shaping before the age of 5

Example:

Mothers are an indispensable part of preschool education. The most important reason is that mothers are the first teachers in any child's life, so children are highly influenced by them. In this way, mothers are the most effective teachers for their children. Another reason why mothers are the best teachers for children is that mothers are usually the sole instructors of children in most families. Children are in contact with their mothers and do not visit others most of the time. Besides, mothers are really dedicated in their education and children learn much more easily from them because mothers devote most of their time and attention to children. In summary, mothers are not only the best teachers for their children but also the crucial part of their education.

Topic Sentence (Containing Main Idea)

Support Idea 1

Support Idea 2

Support Idea 3

Reworded Topic Sentence

Main Idea

Unity and Coherence

These two words are extensively used in essay writing and lecturing. In other words, unity and coherence are essential properties of any specific argument, whether in writing or in talks.

Unity is a property that is defined as 'all the sentences and ideas in a paragraph, must be about the same main idea'.

Coherence is defined as 'a clear and logical connection between elements of a paragraph that enhances fluency and clarity'.

How to create Coherence?

1. 'Explanation' of the support idea
2. 'Reminders' of the precise opinion in the topic sentence
3. 'Transitions'

Exercise:

Find the three above mentioned 'coherence factors' in the sample paragraph.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Another version of the above paragraph:

No one could deny the importance of mothers in preschool education. The most important reason is that mothers are usually the first teachers in any child's life, while there is no one else at home to educate them; children start playgroups or day nurseries after the age 2. Therefore, children are highly influenced by their mothers. Another reason for our argument is that 'actions speak louder than words!', so what mothers do as a role model is a very efficient way of shaping children's personality, and this begins well before they start to go to school. You may be amazed how children's behaviour is similar to their parents in later life. Children with troubled families, continue to have troubled lives and vice versa. As a last argument, I think mothers are generally quite dedicated in children's education and devote most of their time and attention to the latter. This creates a huge amount of exposure for children to learning materials. Exposure to learning media is the crucial part of any educational facility, and nothing is comparable to the enormous amount of time that is available at home. In summary, mothers are not only essential for their children's education, but are sometimes the only means of children's learning.