

Lecture 5 - Basic Writing Skill 6

SUPPORTING SENTENCES



In the previous lesson, we have learnt that a paragraph has three parts: the topic sentence, the body and the concluding sentence. In this lesson, we will study the body in details. The body of a paragraph has two main parts: supporting sentences and supporting details.

What are supporting sentences?

Supporting sentences are the sentences which specify the controlling idea expressed in the topic sentence. Supporting sentences construct the body of a paragraph; therefore, if the paragraph does not have effective supporting sentences, the meaning of the paragraph may collapse. Readers may find it confusing to follow the author's ideas. Effective supporting sentences often provide detailed information about the topic sentence. In other words, they will provide readers with the answers to the questions - Who, What, Where, When, Why and How - to support the main idea of the paragraph.

What are supporting details?

As you know, the body is regarded as the white creamy filling of the Oreo cookie, which is mainly made from flour, cream and other additional ingredients like sugar, vanilla, or salt. Supporting details, like sugar, vani, or salt that are added to enhance the wonderful flavor of the white creamy filling, give more information, statistics, explanations, or examples to the supporting sentences and help readers have a clearer picture of the idea development in the paragraph.

E.g. Study the following paragraph.

The invention of the car has provided many benefits to

Topic Sentence

travelers. *Firstly, with an automobile, man is able to travel vast distances in short periods of time.* What

once took three weeks on horseback can now be done in a matter of hours. *Besides, the comfort enjoyed by*

car travelers, compared to horse-drawn ones, is amazing. To illustrate this, passengers transported by

cars are no longer affected by the harsh weather conditions. While in the past, horse-drawn travelers had

to suffer the cold of winter or the heat of summer, today people can enjoy a relaxing trip thanks to the

enclosed interiors that offer air conditioning and heating system in most cars. *Last but not least, modern cars*

give further protection in case of road accidents. They are added safety features such as seat belts and airbags

which can decrease the death rate from traffic incidents. In conclusion, with all the advantages an

automobile offers, no one would dream of using the expression "Get a horse" today.

Supporting Sentences

Supporting Details

Concluding Sentence

Exercise 1: Read the following paragraphs whose the topic sentences are in bold. Analyze their structure by writing **SS** before the supporting sentences, **SD** before the supporting details of the paragraphs.

Paragraph 1:

Psychologists have four goals of studying behaviors. First, they seek to describe behaviors. Second, they look for explanations of the behaviors. Psychologists propose a theory to explain a behavior and then they conduct research to test the hypothesis. From the result of the research, the scientists confirm whether the theory is true or not. As a consequence, the theory changes as the research brings new results. The third goal of behavior investigation is prediction. Using their research, psychologists try to predict how a human or animal will act in a certain situation. Finally, the fourth goal of doing research into behaviors is to influence them. Some discoveries of basic science found that children who lacked stimulation were slow to develop, which helps psychologists working with neglected children understand them better than before.

Paragraph 2:

A survey, the most practical way to gather data on the attitudes of people, may consist of interviews, questionnaires, or a combination of the two; however, they are quite different from each other. Regarding the flexibility, interviews allow researchers to observe participants and modify questions if the participants are confused about them. As a result, the data collected will be more reliable and factual. In contrast to interviews, people who take part in surveys may have difficulties choosing the answers because the ranges of options are not complete or suitable for them, which may lead to the unreal outcomes of the studies. When it comes to the efficiency, questionnaires are likely to be filled in by thousands of participants while interviews are attended by a smaller number of people. Besides, people doing questionnaires have to answer the same questions, so it is easier for researchers to analyze the data with more uniform results.

Ways to write supporting sentences and supporting details

Based on the controlling idea in the topic sentence, there are many ways to write supporting sentences and supporting details in order to clarify the topic sentence. In this lesson, we will deal with four ways.

1. Giving explanations, definitions, or descriptions

The writer usually gives explanations, definitions, or descriptions to support the main idea of the paragraph. These will often provide more details and information on a technical term, a thing, or an idea. This is the most common and easiest form of paragraph development.

E.g. Study the following paragraph. In this paragraph, the supporting ideas give a detailed description of the main idea "there are many levels to join, from level I (no experience) to level VI (the most experience)".

River rafting is a challenging sport; however, it is still interesting to many people including non-experienced goers because there are many levels to join, from level I (no experience) to level VI (the most experience). At level I, the river moves slowly and does not have many dangerous rocks and boulders, so you can actually enjoy the scenery. At each level up scale, there are an increasing number of powerful waves and sharp rocks. When the river is high from melting snow, the current is fast; as a result, the ride is rough. Therefore, it is only for the most experienced river runners. In short, even the sport seems dangerous; it caters for all tastes of adventurous people.

Paragraph Structure:

Topic Sentence: River rafting is a challenging sport; however, it is still interesting to many people including non-experienced goers because there are many levels to join, from level I (no experience) to level VI (the most experience).

- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 1:** At level I, the river moves slowly and does not have many dangerous rocks and boulders, so you can actually enjoy the scenery.
- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 2:** At each level up scale, there are an increasing number of powerful waves and sharp rocks.
 - **Supporting Detail 1:** When the river is high from melting snow, the current is fast; as a result, the ride is rough.
 - **Supporting Detail 2:** Therefore, it is only for the most experienced river runners.

Concluding sentence: In short, even the sport sounds dangerous; it caters for all tastes of adventurous people.

2. Giving reasons

Giving reasons is another way to develop the topic sentence. It is often used in cause-effect paragraphs and problem-solution paragraphs.

E.g. Study the following paragraph. In this paragraph, the supporting ideas state the reasons why emails are popular today.

Communicating by e-mails is an increasingly popular trend for many reasons. First, it is a simply easy way to send messages among people who do not like to use telephones. Second, it is useful for sending suggestions or requests. People who receive them have enough time to think carefully about their responses. Also, e-mail messages always have a uniform format regardless of different senders. This means senders do not have to worry about the quality of their letter paper as well as the clues to their age, gender, race, or physical conditions. Furthermore, emails do not show senders' feelings or emotional conditions. For the advantages above, it is understandable why emails are commonly used around the world.

Paragraph Structure:

Topic Sentence: Communicating by e-mails is an increasingly popular trend for many reasons.

- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 1:** First, it is a simply easy way to send messages among people who do not like to use telephones. (a reason why people use e-mails)
- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 2:** Second, it is useful for sending suggestions or requests. (a reason why people use e-mails)
 - **Supporting Detail 1:** People who receive them have enough time to think carefully about their responses. (a more detailed explanation for the reason)
- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 3:** Also, e-mail messages always have a uniform format regardless of different senders. (a reason why people use e-mails)
 - **Supporting Detail 1:** This means senders do not have to worry about the quality of their letter paper as well as the clues to their age, gender, race, or physical conditions. (a more detailed explanation for the reason)

3. Giving facts and statistics

The writer also uses facts and statistics to develop a paragraph. Using facts and statistics assures the readers that the information in the paragraph is objective because it comes from reliable sources. In the academic style, whenever you state facts and statistics, you should acknowledge the authors and the sources. However, in the IELTS writing test, you do not need to state clearly the sources you take the information from.

E.g. Study the following paragraph. In this paragraph, the supporting ideas consist of the statistics related to televised violence and juvenile crime.

Another risk factor associated with juvenile crime is the effect of the television on children today. Scientific research has shown that before the time a child has reached seventh grade, the average child has witnessed 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television. Reported in Youth Forum held in 2011, it was concluded that long-term childhood exposure to televised violence is a casual factor behind one half of the homicides committed by youngsters in the United States every year. Besides, there are many statistics showing that there is a higher aggression level formed in people who watched a great deal of violence on television or played violent video games as a child. There is no doubt that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of juvenile offences in society.

Paragraph Structure:

Topic Sentence: Another risk factor associated with juvenile crime is the effect of the television on children today.

- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 1:** Scientific research has shown that before the time a child has reached seventh grade, the average child has witnessed 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television. (a statistic about the amount of violence children watch)
- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 2:** Reported in Youth Forum held in 2011, it was concluded that long-term childhood exposure to televised violence is a casual factor behind one half of the homicides committed by youngsters in the United States every year. (a statistic about the effect of televised violence on juvenile crimes)
- ✓ **Supporting Sentence 3:** Besides, there are many statistics showing that there is a higher aggression level formed in young people who watched a great deal of violence on television or played violent video games as a child. (a statistic about the effect of televised violence on people)

Concluding sentence: There is no doubt that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of juvenile offences in society.

4. Giving examples

Like statistics and facts, examples are used variously in paragraphs to support the controlling ideas. The reason why the writer uses examples is that they are specific and understandable. The examples may come from a real event, or from a personal experience that the writer obtains.

E.g. Study the following paragraph. In this paragraph, the supporting ideas consist of the examples related to some factors which impact the levels of jet lag people may have.

Individuals are not all affected to the same degree by jet lag. For example, "night owls", people who are usually most alert and lively late at night, are less likely to feel the effects of jet lag. Younger people suffer less than older travelers probably because older people's bodies are deteriorating. In terms of personality types, extroverts (people who are sociable and like to be in groups) tend to suffer less than introverts. The reason lies behind the fact that extroverts may easily ignore the symptoms of jet lag by talking to or watching films with their fellow travelers. In general, different types of people may suffer from different levels of jet lag.

Paragraph Structure:

Topic Sentence: Individuals are not all affected to the same degree by jet lag.

✓ **Supporting Sentence 1:** For example, "night owls," people who are usually most alert and lively late at night, are less likely to feel the effects of jet lag. (an example for the effect of people's body clock)

✓ **Supporting Sentence 2:** Younger people suffer less than older travelers probably because older people's bodies are deteriorating. (an example for the effect of people's age)

✓ **Supporting Sentence 3:** In terms of personality types, extroverts (people who are sociable and like to be in groups) tend to suffer less than introverts. (an example for the effect of personality types)

- **Supporting Detail 1:** The reason lies behind the fact that extroverts may easily ignore the symptoms of jet lag by talking to or watching films with their fellow travelers.

Concluding Sentence: In general, different types of people may catch different levels of jet lag.

Exercise 2: Read the following paragraphs, whose the topic sentences and concluding sentences are in bold. Decide which ways of giving supporting sentences and supporting details are used to back up the controlling ideas. Write the following letters before each supporting sentences, or supporting details. Each letter can be used more than once.

A for Giving explanations, definitions, or descriptions

B for Giving reasons

C for Giving facts and statistics

D for Giving examples

Paragraph 1:

Recently, human actions have caused costly degradation to some valuable ecosystem services. In the Catskill Mountains of New York State, watersheds are degraded due to the destruction of forests for farming and building. In Brazil, because of the deforestation and the use of insecticides, there are not enough insects to pollinate certain important food plants. **These examples show us how our actions can be very damaging to economies.**

Paragraph 2:

There are two main varieties of bananas, the fruit (sweet banana) and the plantain. The fruit banana is eaten raw when it turns yellow and develops a tasty sweetness which contains a lot of water with soft, smooth, creamy, yet firm pulp. The plantain, a cooked banana, is also referred to as the meal, vegetable or horse banana. Plantains have a lower water content, making them drier than fruit bananas.

Paragraph 3:

The global demand for water has tripled since 1950. One reason for the increased demand for water is the rapid population growth. Each person on earth consumes, on average, 10 million gallons of water in a lifetime. Besides, the growing need for water is also attributed to the development of the industries. According to Earth Policy Institute, approximately 70 percent of the fresh water used by humans goes to agriculture. Also, it was reported in a study that oil and natural gas production together would account for 10 percent of global energy-related water demand in 2035. **As a result, the water requirement for humans has been emerging considerably in recent years.**

Exercise 3: Write FIVE to SIX supporting sentences for each of the following topic sentences.

1. Fast food causes two negative impacts on people's health.
2. Television is one of the most important sources of information.
3. Studying a foreign language brings people two benefits.
4. Overpopulation in the world leads to two negative consequences for societies.
5. Many people believe there are only two main factors that influence people's career choice.