

# What Is a Paragraph?

A **paragraph** is a collection of sentences that describe, discuss, or explain one central idea. The three main parts of a paragraph are:

- the topic sentence
- the supporting detail sentences
- the concluding sentence

Every part has a specific function, and every part is important.

## Supporting Sentences

Think of **supporting sentences** as scaffolding for the topic sentence. They **describe, explain, clarify, or give examples of the main idea** in the topic sentence. They answer questions such as **Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?** They explain the topic sentence in greater detail and give the reader more information.



Each paragraph that you write must have enough supporting details to make the main idea clear to the reader. Likewise, a good writer makes sure that each supporting sentence is related to the topic sentence and its controlling idea. Study the following examples.

1. Topic sentence: People should consider joining a health club.  
Supporting sentence: Health clubs give members an opportunity to exercise and socialize at the same time.
2. Topic sentence: Emergency towing service is great to have in case your car breaks down.  
Supporting sentence: It can help you change a flat tire.
3. Topic sentence: Cell phones allow parents to stay in better contact with their children.  
Supporting sentence: As long as his or her cell phone is turned on, a child can be reached at any time.



## Types of Supporting Sentences

Good writers use many different kinds of supporting sentences. Good supporting sentences perform the following functions:

### 1. Supporting sentences explain.

Topic sentence: There are many support services for students at the university.

Supporting sentence: These services, such as tutoring, are generally free for students.  
(explains the support services available for students at the university)

### 2. Supporting sentences describe.

Topic sentence: I will never forget my childhood home.

Supporting sentence: The house had a large entrance with a spiral staircase in the center.  
(describes the writer's childhood home)

### 3. Supporting sentences give reasons.

Topic sentence: Note taking is one of the most important study skills to learn.

Supporting sentence: Reviewing good notes before a test will help students become more familiar with the information. (gives a reason that note taking is an important study skill to learn)

### 4. Supporting sentences give facts.

Topic sentence: Jogging is not as easy as it appears.

Supporting sentence: Ninety-seven percent of people cannot jog three miles without stopping.  
(gives a fact about jogging)

### 5. Supporting sentences give examples.

Topic sentence: Brazil has many natural resources.

Supporting sentence: Brazil is one of the leading producers of bauxite, a principal ingredient for making aluminum. (gives an example of Brazil's natural resources)

## ACTIVITY 9 Creating Questions Leading to Supporting Details

Read each topic sentence below. What information would you expect the writer to include in the paragraph? For each topic sentence, write two questions that the supporting sentences should answer. Ask *Who? What? When? Where? Why?* or *How?*

1. Pesticides should not be used on farm products.

What kinds of pesticides are used? Why should we avoid using pesticides on farm products?

2. The beaches along the Mediterranean Sea are some of the best beaches in the world.

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\_\_\_\_\_



3. Although few people realize it, country music and rock music have some similar characteristics.

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4. My best friend and I met in a very unlikely place.

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## Avoiding Unrelated Sentences

Some writers include too many ideas in one paragraph. Remember that a paragraph should focus on just one controlling idea. Every sentence must support the topic sentence in some way. These supporting sentences help maintain the unity of the paragraph.

### ACTIVITY 10 Identifying Supporting Sentences

Read the following paragraphs. For each numbered sentence, write *good supporting sentence* or *unrelated sentence* below the paragraph. Then explain your answer.

#### Paragraph 5

##### The Features of a Good Restaurant

Certain qualities are typical of good restaurants. These restaurants provide fast and friendly service, with servers who are friendly and courteous at all times. They make sure that customers' needs are met throughout the meal. 1 Since customers are choosing to eat out, obviously the quality of the food is important. A good restaurant uses fresh ingredients in its dishes. 2 Some of the best-quality cheeses can be imported from France. 3 Good restaurants also have a pleasant atmosphere. They are clean and well maintained, and they also pay attention to details such as decor, lighting, and music.





## Connecting Topic Sentences and Supporting Details

In a paragraph good supporting details support the topic sentence. Supporting details are related to the topic sentence that they support.

### ACTIVITY 13 Brainstorming for Topic Sentences

For each topic below, brainstorm ideas for a topic sentence.

1. A happy, surprising moment in your life

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. A famous person you would like to meet

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Good study habits

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



- Think and write **topic sentences** AND – **3(three) bizarre, clever, creative and unique supporting/ detail ideas** (facts, examples, etc.) for **2** topic sentences you wrote. The most bizarre and creative ideas win the competition. **USE ENGLISH ONLY OR YOU ARE DISQUALIFIED.**
- *EXAMPLE: Most teens feel too tired to take up a job.*

**Idea 1:** *In our teen years, we do so many things in our everyday life that, whenever we have some extra time and energy, we save it for some “me time” to relax a little bit.*

**Idea 2:** *Also, we are so busy with schoolwork and working with CHAT GTP so we cannot find extra energy for another responsibility like a job.*

**Idea 3:** *Some of us are so focused on our online projects like learning how to code or hack WhatsApp or Instagram accounts because we prefer to spend these years learning things than working; we have the rest of our lives to work.*

○ Topic 1: hobbies and teens. *What can you say about this topic?*

○ Topic 2: senior students and new jobs/ careers. *What can you say about this topic?*

○ Topic 3: few friends and/ or lots of acquaintances in teen years. *What can you say about this topic?*



#### ACTIVITY 14 Asking the Right Questions

Choose one of the topic sentences you created in Activity 13. Write questions for it using the appropriate interrogative (question) words. If you cannot think of at least three questions, perhaps your topic sentence is weak. For more practice, repeat this activity with your other topic sentences.

1. Topic sentence: One of the best days of my life occurred last year.

Who? Who was involved in the event?

What? What happened?

When? When did this event happen?

Where? Where did the event happen?

Why? Why was it the best day?

Other: How did you feel at the time?

2. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

What? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_