

Here's  
How 2-1

## Paragraph

### Focus Your Learning

- focus ideas for a topic
- identify organizational patterns: chronological order
- choose style depending on purpose

A paragraph is a unit of writing that may stand on its own or be part of a larger work, such as a story or essay. It has a particular structure and focusses the attention of the reader by arranging details into a unified whole.

### Characteristics of a Paragraph

- Successful, clear, forceful paragraphs usually have three characteristics: unity, coherence, and emphasis. **Unity** means that the paragraph contains only what is relevant to the topic. Everything else should be omitted. As you write, ask yourself, “Is this fact, idea, or statement pertinent to my topic?” **Coherence** refers to the logical arrangement and progression of ideas within a paragraph. Writers achieve coherence in two ways: by presenting their ideas in a proper sequence, and by using transition or connective words to show clearly how ideas follow from one another. **Emphasis** means that important elements in the paragraph are made to stand out.
- Paragraphs vary in length. When you write stories, you may have paragraphs with several sentences describing something, or a single sentence to record dialogue. Usually in informal writing your paragraphs are relatively short. Formal writing—research papers, for example—may contain paragraphs of several hundred words.
- All paragraphs contain a topic sentence which embodies the main idea of the paragraph. It may be general (Dogs are good pets) or specific (My West Highland Terrier thinks everyone loves her). As a rule, specific topic sentences tend to be more interesting and easier to develop in a single paragraph.

**Hint** As you write, try to be aware of the possibilities of varying the length of your paragraphs in order to create emphasis, contrast, or a change of pace.

## Terms and Techniques

**Topic Sentence** Expresses the main idea of the paragraph. Most paragraphs contain a topic sentence.

**Clinching Sentence** A concluding sentence that sums up and sometimes adds to the main idea of the paragraph.

**Transitions/Connectives** Words that show clearly how ideas are connected with one another.

**Closing by Return** A restatement of the thought found in the topic sentence, sometimes used in the clinching sentence.

## How to Write an Effective Paragraph

- There is no absolute rule about the position of the **topic sentence**. In some paragraphs they occur in the middle, preceded by an introduction and followed by elaboration. In others, they are placed at the end to create a dramatic effect, to produce suspense, to clinch an argument, or to provide a link with the next paragraph. In some paragraphs the topic sentence is implied rather than stated directly.
- The information or argument in a paragraph needs to be presented in an order, or **sequence** that is appropriate to your subject. If you are writing about a series of events, the order of time is important. If you are presenting an argument, you may want to clinch it by stating your most important point last, or by specifying details and then stating the general conclusion that you draw from these details (as in the text model that follows). If you are describing a picture, you may wish to describe the general scene first and then focus on certain details.

### Computers, Chips, and Automation (excerpt)

by Heather Menzies

On farms, microprocessors incorporated into mechanical feeding systems can monitor and control the amount of chop being channelled from the silo into the feedlot. In homes, they can monitor the furnace, the humidifier and even the stove, and guard against break-ins. In office copiers, they can react to commands encoded in the information beamed to them from

*Notice how this paragraph moves from a series of specific examples to a general conclusion in the last sentence.*

a word processor down the hall. In factories, they can monitor temperatures, test chemical solutions and control the arms of assembly-line robots. All told, it has been estimated (in *BusinessWeek*) that nearly half of all jobs could be eliminated, deskilled or otherwise changed by the current second wave of automation.

- To help your readers follow the flow of your ideas, use **connective or transition words**. These words are like bridges between sentences, showing the relationship between the ideas. Compare the following two paragraphs, noting how the transition words in the second version blend the sentences into a smooth, cohesive whole.

*I was afraid I might fail my English exam and disappoint my father. I had been staying up late to prepare for it. The night before the exam I studied until 2:00 a.m. I almost fell asleep in class the next day. I did well in the exam.*

***Because** I was afraid I might fail my English exam and disappoint my father, I had been staying up late to prepare for it. **In fact**, the night before the exam, I didn't go to bed until 2:00 a.m. **Although** I almost fell asleep in class the next day, I did well in my examination.*

**Pronouns** can also function as connectors between sentences. In the following example, the pronoun *their* in the second sentence refers to the antecedent *trees* in the first sentence, thus linking the two sentences together.

*The trees were destroyed by the wind and ice. Their branches were broken and their leaves were stripped off.*

### Common Transitional Terms

Expressions	Word Examples		
to show an addition of ideas	and besides	also further	in addition too
to show contrast or difference	although despite yet	but in contrast whereas	however nevertheless on the other hand



**Common Transitional Terms** (cont'd)

Expressions	Word Examples		
to show similarity	again likewise	similarly in other words	
to show logical connections	so hence	because therefore	as a result consequently
to introduce examples or illustrations	for example that is	namely for instance	to illustrate
to show emphasis	indeed mainly	in fact chiefly	primarily especially
to show space and time relations	above beyond next after later meanwhile	below here there then while eventually	behind nearby to the right (left) before now at present

- ❖ You can achieve **emphasis** in a paragraph in various ways.
  - a forceful topic sentence
  - an effective conclusion (clinging sentence)
  - placement of key ideas near the beginning and end
  - elaboration with supporting details and examples
  - comparison and contrast
  - purposeful repetition of words and phrases
  - repetition of words with similar meaning (synonyms)
  - repetition of grammatical structure (parallelism)
  - repetition and restatement of sentences.
  
- ❖ Effective **paragraph development** means including sufficient evidence, details, examples, definitions, or explanations to support your topic sentence.
  
- ❖ Most paragraphs, especially long ones, include a **clinging sentence** that captures the essence of the paragraph. When your topic sentence occurs at the beginning of the paragraph, you can use the clinging sentence to repeat the main idea (closing by return) or take it one step further.