

Writing in English: from the Paragraph to the Essay

A paragraph is a collection of coherent sentences that turn around a specific topic. The basic unit for paragraph writing is the sentence; however, the clutch of sentences must not be grouped arbitrarily. The prime condition in paragraph scripting is not to deviate from the central idea forming the main theme of writing otherwise one will lose the line of thought and wind up writing about anything but not the topic in question. Hence, a well-written paragraph carries the reader through an unblemished path far from roundabouts.

A paragraph can exhibit diverse information type ranging from short sequences treating various themes to longer sketches discussing a topic in details. While the sentence forms the basic unit of the paragraph, the latter is the key component of the essay. A paragraph can narrate a string of episodes through time, it can portray the functioning of a procedure, it can describe a person, a place, an event...etc., it can be used to compare between objects or concepts, it can be referred to while proffering chains of causes and effects, and it can be used as well as a means to persuade the other about a given idea.

While the sentence is considered as the key component of a paragraph, the latter is seen as the main constituent of the essay. The three elements: the sentence, the paragraph, and the essay exist in such a harmony as to form larger structures of discourse for the sake of delivering a specific message to the reader. That being said, writing proficiency is built hand in hand with reading proficiency; one can easily detect that good readers are often good writers. Without further complicating matters, in the context of L2 reading and writing, both skills go hand in hand and are complimentary indeed without forgetting the fact that the subconscious plays a major role in stocking unlimited amounts of styles and expressions ready to be used in different writing contexts.

The Topic Sentence

It is defined as the skeleton of the paragraph. Every successful paragraph is a reflection of a healthy organized thought that turns around a unique point and that does not deviate from that single idea. The topic sentence might carry out several functions: it guides the harmony of the paragraph content and provides a clear path for smooth transfer from one idea to the next, it keeps the writer in an up-to-date relation with the main theme of the paragraph, one role of the paragraph is to prop up and validate an essay's main idea or thesis statement. In general, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of the paragraph since

readers put a glance at what comes first before moving to the rest of the paragraph. That's why it is advised to start the paragraph directly with the topic sentence, however; it is possible to herald it with one or two opening sentences that serve either as mere introduction or mere linkage between a set of paragraphs.

The presence of the topic sentence is primordial in all paragraph types; still it is possible to discard it in some situations. In the case of beginner writers this step is not opted for though. For instance, it is possible to omit the topic sentence in a narrative paragraph that exposes a series of actions where one develops of another, as well a topic sentence can be removed where the next paragraph is just a continuation of a previous one i.e. paragraphs are linked in an essay form.

The Layout of the Paragraph

Usually, a paragraph starts with the topic sentence; this is the rule of thumb. In the case where the writer is advanced in his endeavour, he can start by a couple or a triple of sentences for the sake of introducing the general idea or paving the way for what is to come. A paragraph contains the following,

- 1- **An introduction:** this part should include the topic sentence together with the introductory sentences.
- 2- **A body:** it comes just after the introductory sentences; the writer is free in this section to expand his thoughts around the topic sentence. Depending on the type of the paragraph, the writer can argue, describe, analyse, or narrate events.
- 3- **A conclusion:** in this last part of the paragraph the writer can simply summarise the information mentioned in the piece of writing. It is possible to give one's opinions as well so as to open the door for new perspectives.

Important Notes:

A well-structured paragraph needs to show coherence of ideas. That is all that should be mentioned must relate in one way or another to the topic sentence; the slightest risk of losing one's line of thought imperils the natural flow of ideas. A good piece of writing does not relate to the length or the quantity of pages but to the quality of the style and the organization of ideas.

It is good to keep up with the core idea of the paragraph so that the writer reminds himself every time about the topic he is discussing; this allows him to maintain the steadiness of thought through referring back to the key point here and there. Psychologically speaking, he would be reminding himself about the content of the instruction.

Another important tip in good writing is the ability to manipulate one's style of writing. One idea is to create attractive writing styles that would look same and parallel; the result is a nice, vibrant, and unblemished style. Sometimes repeating the same style in a sequence of successive structures helps the reader understand the connection between ideas and the tie of the letter to the key idea.

A good paragraph shows uniformity of opinions, attitudes, and especially tense use. One should pay attention to the consistent shift of verb tense since it might create confusion.

For a paragraph to be well-written it is vital to know how to create the transition from one sentence or idea to the next. The solution for this is the harmonious use of transitions and phrases whose function is the maintenance of the paragraph's flow of thought. Well-chosen phrases and transitions guide the reader through the paragraph's analysis and aids him discovering the otherwise previously unclear connections.

The following is a paragraph showing all the criteria mentioned above.

Example:

The Best Place To Live

If an extraterrestrial were to land on Earth, it would have its choice of over 190 countries in which to live. It would be a difficult decision, but one country is certainly a better choice than most of the others. Canada is one of the best countries in the world due to its health care system, standard of education, and its urban centres. First, Canada has a universal health care system which "comprehensive coverage for medically necessary hospital and physician services" (Health Canada). This allows all Canadians to have access to medical services regardless of their income or geographical location in the country. Second, Canada has a high standard of education that is also publically funded by all levels of government from kindergarten to secondary levels and has resulted in a 99% national literacy rate ("Education in Canada"). Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed with both Calgary, Alberta and Ottawa, Ontario ranking first and fourth on the Sierra Club's cleanest cities in the world ("Cleanest Cities"). Overall, Canada has more to offer with its health care, education, and cities that would be a wonderful for anyone anywhere on the planet or in orbit above it.

Adapted from Scott Findley, School District 43
Gleneagle Secondary.