

A **paragraph** is a group of sentences about a topic. A typical paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**, which introduces the topic. The sentences that follow support the idea in the topic sentence with explanations, reasons, and other details. The **concluding sentence** brings the paragraph to an end.

Effective writing must have **unity**. A paragraph has unity when all the sentences support one single idea.

The paragraph must have one controlling idea in the topic sentence. Otherwise, the paragraph loses focus.

The supporting sentences must support, demonstrate, prove, or develop the main idea in the topic sentence. If they do not, they will be irrelevant or off-topic and destroy the unity of the paragraph.

Coherence in a paragraph means that the ideas have a logical flow: the relationship between the sentences is clear, and one idea connects to the next. One way to achieve coherence in a paragraph is to use a pattern of organization, such as **time order**, **spatial order**, or **order of importance**. To use time order, tell what happened first, next, and last. Spatial order is useful for describing items from top to bottom or from side to side. Paragraphs organized by order of importance might give the most important ideas first or leave them for last.

A **sentence** contains at least one **subject** (a noun or a phrase) and a **verb**, and it expresses a complete idea. The verb expresses the action of the sentence, and the subject tells who or what completed the action. A **simple sentence** may contain more than one noun or verb.

A **run-on sentence** is not a correct sentence. In a run-on sentence, important punctuation is missing between the clauses. The sentence “runs on” too long and confuses the reader.

A **dependent clause** is a clause that is not a complete sentence by itself. It has a subject and a verb, but it does not have a complete idea. A dependent clause often starts with a **subordinating conjunction** like *because, before, since, when, after, or while*. A dependent clause must always be attached to a main (or independent) clause to make one complete sentence. The dependent clause can come before or after the main clause without changing the meaning, but the punctuation is different.

dependent clause

main clause

When I talk to my friend, she likes to tell me about her adventures.

main clause

dependent clause

My friend likes to tell me about her adventures when I talk to her.

A **narrative** is a story. It has an introduction that engages the reader's interest, details about the main event or action in the story, and a conclusion that describes the outcome.

Showing Sequence in Narrative Essays

In narrative essays, we use **time expressions** to clarify the sequence of events.

We use connectors (**time adverbs**) such as *then, finally, or eventually* to link sentences within a paragraph.

We use **subordinating conjunctions** to link clauses within a sentence.

Time Adverbs

We use time adverbs such as *afterward, after that, eventually, finally, later, later on, now, then, and suddenly* as connectors. These connectors usually appear at the beginning of a sentence. When they do, they are immediately followed by a comma.

time clause

After our parents left the hotel,
Before my **brother** was born,

main clause

we went into the street.
I was an only child.

main clause

We went into the street
I was an only child

time clause

after our parents left the hotel.
before my **brother** was born.

Adding Details to Essays

Details are facts, examples, illustrations, definitions, and descriptions. They answer *who*, *what*, *why*, *where*, *when*, and *how* questions. We add details to make our writing clearer and more effective.

GENERAL	DETAIL	
He went on vacation.	<i>Why?</i>	He was completely exhausted.
	<i>How?</i>	He traveled first class in an airplane.
	<i>Where?</i>	He traveled to Africa.
	<i>Who?</i>	Although he traveled alone, he met many interesting people.

A **comparison-contrast essay** uses **points of comparison** to show how two topics in the same category are similar and/or different.

A comparison-contrast essay can focus on similarities, differences, or both, depending on the writer's purpose.

Comparison-Contrast Connectors

In comparison-contrast essays, **connectors** help create coherence by indicating the relationship between ideas in sentences.

Connectors That Show Similarity

Use connectors such as *like* (+ noun phrase) or *similarly* to show similarity.

Like her sister, Angela was very tall.

I grew up overseas in Shanghai. **Similarly**, my wife spent her childhood abroad in Laos.

Connectors That Show Contrast

Use connectors like *unlike* (+ noun phrase) or *in contrast* to show contrast.

Unlike my father, I feel shy when I meet new people.

The pace of life in New York is very rapid. **In contrast**, life in Xela is slower.

In an **opinion essay**, the writer tries to convince the reader of a point of view on a controversial issue (something that people disagree about).

Facts and Opinions

Writers use both **facts** and **opinions** to support their positions or arguments. They state their opinions and then back them up with facts. The difference between facts and opinions is shown below.

A **fact** is a truth that is scientifically proven or generally accepted.

A smart phone allows the user to access the Internet.

An **opinion** is one point of view among many.

Cell phones are destroying people's privacy.

Counter-Argument and Refutation

To make an opinion essay as persuasive as possible, the writer includes a **counter-argument** and a **refutation**.

The counter-argument is the opposing opinion. It disagrees with the writer's position. By including the counter-argument, the writer shows an understanding of other points of view.

The refutation is the writer's response to the counter-argument. In the refutation, the writer shows why the counter-argument is weak and the writer's position is strong. The refutation may also address doubts the reader may have about the writer's position.

Using Quantity Expressions in Opinion Essays

In an opinion essay, writers often make general statements. It is important to avoid making a statement that is true for some but not for all members of a group or category. This is called an **overgeneralization**. Compare the following statements.

Cats hate water. Most cats hate water.

The first statement suggests that all cats in the world hate water. It is untrue because some cats, such as tigers, are good swimmers and enjoy being in water. In the second statement, the writer uses the **quantity expression** *most*. The quantity expression qualifies, or limits the generalization, so that the statement is true.