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Writing an Effective TEE Paragraph

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will examine TEE paragraphs by discussing supporting sentences, and learning how to construct effective TEE paragraphs. Specifically, this tutorial focuses on:

1. TEE Paragraph

The TEE structure is just one organizational structure you might deploy. Its name refers to the topic sentence, examples, and explanation. These kinds of paragraphs are mostly used in professional and academic settings because they're so good for offering specific, detailed arguments.

Like all paragraphs, they start with a topic sentence, which introduces the reader to the main point of the paragraph. And then they have **supporting sentences** and concluding sentences.

What makes a TEE paragraph unique? You'll recall that in any paragraph, the supporting sentences are sentences that are neither topic nor conclusion, but that offer additional facts and details to support the main point. These often provide supporting details or smaller parts of the whole, tangible facts that help the reader to better understand and believe that the main idea presented in the topic sentence is true and valid.

However, in a TEE paragraph, the sentences provide, specifically, examples and explanations. That means that they can put limits up around the main idea, define or clarify a term or concept from the main idea, provide an example of what the main idea asserts, or offer an explanation of what the main idea claims.

Below is an underlined topic sentence with four different types of supporting sentences below it.

Taking long airplane flights can be physically challenging, so it's important to create comfort however you can.

It may not be possible to ride in First Class or bring aboard a gourmet meal, but you can provide small areas of comfort for yourself. (Limiting)

In this case, we want to consider "comfort" to be anything that eases the physical stress and personal boredom or sitting for long hours on a plane. (Defining)

For example, you might wear comfortable clothes in layers so that you can easily maintain the temperature most comfortable for you. (Example)

In this way, you will be able to create physical comfort even if the cabin temperature is warmer or cooler than you would prefer. (Explanation)

- The first supporting sentence is a *limiting supporting sentence*. Notice how it restricts the scope of the main idea.
- The second supporting sentence is a *defining supporting sentence*. Notice how it clarifies the terms that are presented in the topic sentence.
- The third supporting sentence is an *example supporting sentence*. Notice how this sentence gives an example of what the topic sentence claims.
- The last supporting sentence is an *explanation supporting sentence*. Notice how this explains further what the previous example asserts.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Supporting Sentence
A sentence in a paragraph that supports the topic sentence by offering more facts or details.

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2. Selecting Supporting Sentences

Now you know what supporting sentences can do. How do you select and craft the best and most effective sentence possible? Some sentences will be more effective in certain circumstances than others. So it's up to you to think carefully about what kind of support your topic sentence demands.

All effective supporting sentences will follow certain rules. They will each provide specific supporting information that is not repeated elsewhere in the paragraph. They will each conform to a logical order and progression of ideas. And they will each relate clearly to the topic sentence, building support for the main idea.

An ineffective supporting sentence will likely include some or all of these errors. It won't clearly develop the paragraph's main idea and may even support a new topic that might not even be relevant to this paragraph.

It will offer information that's already been given elsewhere in the paragraph, thereby redundantly repeating what's already been shown. Or, it'll be so broad or vague that the reader can't quite tell how it's even related to the main idea of this paragraph.

Here is your topic sentence with two different supporting sentences.

Taking long airplane flights can be physically challenging, so it's important to create comfort however you can.

The meal options are often unappetizing and are now quite expensive.(Vague)

One way to make yourself comfortable is to ensure that you will have good food, so bring your own meals and snacks. (Direct)

One supporting sentence is pretty vague and doesn't really seem to follow the direction of this particular main point. It might be a better support for a different paragraph, one that specifically covers food. But it doesn't really seem to connect here.

The other supporting sentence is clear and direct. It offers direct support to the main point and does not repeat what we've already seen in the previous draft of this paragraph.

3. Balancing General and Specific

One way to make sure that your sentences are effective is to think about how general or specific each piece of support needs to be at each point in the paragraph, referring to how broad or narrow the focus is. It can be useful to include both broader and more narrow points to support your main idea. But it's also important to use each of these points well.

Most paragraphs move from more general statements and into more specific ones. That might look like this:

> Holland is an exciting country for history fans to visit. In Amsterdam, you will find many museums full of classic, important paintings. You can even visit the Rembrandt House Museum, where you can see Rembrandt's most famous paintings as well as learn about the way he actually lived in his home!

See how it starts broader in the topic sentence, then moves to support that gets a little more specific, and narrowly focuses on just one small element of the picture?

You can see how general and specific ideas can all help support your main point. In order to write your own paragraphs that balance the general and specific, you might want to use some targeted turns of phrase. Here are some general phrases and words:

- Always
- Usually
- In general
- Many people

See how these refer more broadly to bigger groups and more common occurrences? You'd use these kinds of words in a general sentence, perhaps like this:
Most travelers are interested in seeing cultural events.

Note that this is talking about most travelers and doesn't get into any specifics on what these cultural events are or why travelers might be interested in them. But this isn't a bad sentence; it's just general.

In contrast, here are some specific words and phrases:

- In particular
- Specifically
- People who...
- Those who...

Note that these refer to more particular targeted times or groups of people or examples. You might use them

to write a specific sentence, like this:

Some may find the annual Koningsdag, or Queen's Day, to be an enticing glimpse at Dutch culture.

See how this refers to a particular instance of a particular event that might entice particular travelers if they are the kind of particular people who enjoy this kind of tourism? This is a specific sentence.

4. Relevancy

Regardless of whether you're writing general or specific sentences, you want to be sure to only include relevant details. That is, information or ideas that are not only directly related to the main point, but directly serve the main purpose.

How do you know if a detail is relevant? You'll check to see if it closely aligns with the main idea or main topic as presented in the topic sentence.

Here is another topic sentence and two supporting sentences:

Returning home from a big trip brings with it many emotions.

Some travelers may find it difficult to return to their everyday lives, while others may feel renewed enthusiasm for their day to day. (Relevant)

The 9-5 work schedule is hard to adjust to, and many jobs are not flexible in their scheduling. (Not connected)

The first supporting sentence is clearly relevant. It describes the feelings that travelers might have as they return from travel and re-enter their home life. That is directly related to and supporting our topic sentence.

In contrast, that second sentence is not quite clearly connected yet. The sentence begins promisingly, but the author does not make the connection between the challenges of a nine-to-five job and the main point about returning from travel. And by the second half of the sentence, these details about inflexible work hours are wholly unconnected to the main point. So this isn't relevant in that it's neither closely related to nor directly serving the thesis statement.

5. Putting It All Together

Below is a topic sentence and four supporting sentences. Take a moment to read it carefully as you attempt to break it down to the topic sentence, supporting sentences, broad or specific, and see if you can identify an ineffective sentence. The topic sentence is indicated below as the first sentence in the paragraph.

International travel requires some careful planning. First of all, every traveler will have to choose where to go! Some people like beach vacations, while others prefer cities, each of which demands particular preparation. No matter where you travel, however, you'll need to research the local language, customs, and any other important details about the country. For example, you'll want to know how commonly English is spoken and whether you'll need to be able to translate the local language on your own.

Are all of the supporting sentences effective? The first supporting sentence is pretty broad and vague:

First of all, every traveler will have to choose where to go!

It is not clear and specific as to what kind of planning is required for international travel. It may not be as effective as it could be.

What about the second sentence?

Many people like beach vacations, while others prefer cities, each of which demands particular preparation.

It's definitely general, referring to broader groups of people. But it effectively shows that different locations require different plans, so this is deemed effective.

Now this sentence gets more specific, detailing a list of things that travelers need to consider, in an effective manner:

No matter where you travel, however, you'll need to research the local language, customs, and any other important details about the country.

The last sentence is the most specific:

For example, you'll want to know how commonly English is spoken and whether you'll need to be able to translate the local language on your own.

See how it starts with "For example"? Examples are going to have to be specific, as they're only one item of support. This sentence is also effective, particularly because it's the last sentence. The paragraph worked from a more general idea into this more focused one, and readers are prepared for this kind of example.

📋 SUMMARY

This tutorial reviewed paragraph structure, specifically focusing on **TEE structures**. We got really specific about how TEE supporting sentences might look and how to **select the correct supporting sentence** by identifying if it relates clearly to the topic sentence, building support for the main idea. **Balancing general and specific sentences** means that paragraphs move from more general statements and into more specific ones. Only **relevant** information should be included in supporting sentences. Finally, when you **put it all together**, an ineffective sentence was identified since it was too vague and did not support the topic sentence.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Martina Shabram.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Supporting Sentence

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