

Paragraph Organization

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover how paragraphs are constructed, as well as what kinds of organizational structures can be used for certain paragraphs. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Review of Paragraph Components

As you learned in a previous lesson, a **paragraph** is a collection of sentences within a piece of writing connected by a single focusing idea.

Most paragraphs have:

- A topic sentence, which announces the main idea
- Some supporting sentences, which build support for that main idea
- A concluding sentence, which summarizes and recaps what you just read

However, you can put those three elements together in all kinds of ways, and you can emphasize different things depending on what the purpose of that paragraph is.



TERM TO KNOW

Paragraph

A collection of sentences within a piece of writing, connected by a single focusing idea.

2. Organizational Structures for Paragraphs

Now that you know about the various parts of a paragraph, you can think about ways to organize these parts into an effective whole.

There are four different organization structures:

- Spatial
- Chronological
- Emphatic
- TEE

Each of these is like a model for how you can build a paragraph, and each model can be deployed in a variety of situations. Once you master these four, you'll have plenty of options for any writing challenge.

2a. Spatial

The first model is the spatial organization method. **Spatial paragraphs** examine the details in a particular setting or of a particular person or object. That can include physical spaces or locations that may need description.

This is a really useful paragraph structure when your goal is to describe something specific to a location, such as the best sandwich shop in your hometown.

In my hometown, the best sandwich comes from Saul's Deli. When you walk into Saul's, you'll see a big deli case in front of you, filled with every kind of filling, side dish, and treat you could hope for. I always get a whitefish sandwich on rye, which means that I get to watch the cook slice the thick, brown loaf of bread, heap whitefish onto it, and slather the thing with brown mustard. Every sandwich comes with an amazing dill pickle that pops when you bite into it. *With all this to offer, Saul's can't be beat for a good sandwich.*

Notice how the topic sentence and concluding sentences are on either end, with the supporting sentences on the inside.

Also notice that this paragraph is highly descriptive, full of adjectives and sensory details. It develops in a spatial manner, as if the author were walking the reader through this deli.



TERM TO KNOW

Spatial Paragraphs

Paragraphs that examine the details in a particular setting or of a particular person or object.

2b. Chronological

The second kind of paragraph we're going to practice is the **chronological paragraph**. Just as a spatial paragraph moves physically, chronological paragraphs move in time. They tell what happened in the order in which the events occurred.

This is a great tool for narrating a story, whether that's a story you've made up or a retelling of something that really happened.

When I first went to Saul's Deli, I only wanted to eat a bagel and cream cheese. As I got older, I began to experiment more with the kind of sandwich I would order. As a teenager, I started getting lox on my bagel, which I really liked. Then, one day, I went to the deli and saw someone eating a reuben, which looked delicious. So I asked for one at the deli. Once I took a bite, I knew I could love any kind of sandwich. *Now, I try new things each time I go to Saul's.*

Again, this retains the core paragraph structure of topic, supporting, and then concluding sentences. But here, you move through time with this author as she grows up.

Thus, the chronological method can tell the story of a short period of time, (such as what happens in one day), a longer period of time (such as one's whole life), or even one event (such as telling someone the plot of a

movie from when it starts to how it ends).



TERM TO KNOW

Chronological Paragraphs

Paragraphs that tell what happened in the order in which the events occurred.

2c. Emphatic

The third organizational model is the **emphatic paragraph**. In this structure, you'll organize your sentences based on how important each piece of information is.

You might start by giving the least important facts and move to the most important ones, or you could switch that around and write from most to least important.

Emphatic paragraphs are a great tool when you're writing an argument and trying to convince your readers of something. If you're providing a number of supporting reasons for one claim, you might start with the most convincing argument and then move through to the least convincing one.

There are a few reasons why Saul's is the best sandwich shop in town. First and foremost, it has the most delicious sandwiches of any store around. Second, it has the greatest variety, so you can always find something you'll like. And finally, it has the best ambiance, so you'll always be comfortable there. *Thus, Saul's is the place to be.*

You can probably already spot that topic sentence and concluding sentence, and even find the supporting sentences. You'll also notice that in this argumentative paragraph, the author moves from the most essential reason to the least.



TERM TO KNOW

Emphatic Paragraphs

Paragraphs that organize concepts based upon importance.

2d. TEE

The last paragraph structure is called the **TEE paragraph**. These paragraphs relate a set of facts, explanations, and analysis. Additionally, they contain a topic sentence, explanation, and examples, which is where this type of paragraph gets its name.

A TEE paragraph is a great choice when you're writing an informative paragraph because it will provide a lot of details. Just like all the other paragraphs, a TEE paragraph will have a topic sentence that is then supported by other sentences providing examples and explanations to help prove the main point.

Each of these examples will be a specific piece of information designed to support the topic sentence, and the explanations will be further details about that support that go beyond what is presented in the topic sentence.

This kind of paragraph will generally start with more general information, and then move to more specific ideas. You'll generally have multiple examples and explanations, but only one main point announced in one topic sentence.

You might use a TEE paragraph if you were trying to inform someone with a dairy allergy about what they can order at Saul's deli.

A topic sentence for that paragraph might look like this:

Saul's has a variety of sandwiches you can order if you are allergic to dairy.

That sentence could then be followed with an example:

For example, the sourdough bread is dairy-free, so you can always choose that bread for any sandwich.

See how the example provides support for the main point and then offers some explanation for how that example justifies the topic sentence?

Now consider this as part of the larger paragraph:

Saul's has a variety of sandwiches you can order if you are allergic to dairy. For example, the sourdough bread is dairy-free, so you can always choose that bread for any sandwich. You can also easily ask for the cook to not put cheese on any sandwich. This means that most sandwiches can be made dairy-free. Therefore, Saul's is still a good restaurant even for someone with a dairy allergy.

Do you see the topic sentence, the examples and explanations, and the concluding sentence?

This kind of writing is particularly applicable in professional and academic settings, such as when you're writing a business proposal and need to provide clear examples and explanations for each point in your plan.

In the following paragraph, notice that the topic sentence opens the paragraph and gives a summary of what the main point of the whole discussion is.

When preparing for an exam, there are a number of tricks that one might use to maximize chances for success. To start off with, students should study in a quiet and comfortable environment to assure focus. Moreover, students should make use of all available resources, such as study guides and Q&A sessions. Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge. Altogether, these tricks will help students enter their exam feeling ready to master the challenge.

The topic sentence is followed by supporting sentences, which provide evidence for the main point:

To start off with, students should study in a quiet and comfortable environment to assure focus. Moreover, students should make use of all available resources, such as study guides and Q&A sessions. Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge.

The example gives some detail that would help a reader trust that the statement made in the topic sentence is believable. The explanation clarifies the example, which all goes to prove to the reader that the example is true:

Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge.

Then of course, there is the the concluding sentence, which offers a summary and synthesis of the whole paragraph.

Altogether, these tricks will help students enter their exam feeling ready to master the challenge.



Now it's your turn. Here is a paragraph with a topic sentence, concluding sentence, and three supporting sentences. However, these sentences are not in the right order. Can you spot the ingredients?

First, the host should make sure that the party invitation clearly informs guests about the dress code so that everyone shows up in costume.

In addition, the host should make sure that the decorations reflect the Halloween theme and therefore create a festive environment.

Overall, setting up these elements will assure the host of a spooky and fun soiree.

Throwing a fun Halloween party isn't very difficult as long as the host follows some basic guidelines.

And of course, the host should have a ton of snacks and drinks prepared, and if those are also themed, that's even better.

Which one of these is the topic sentence? It's the only sentence here that doesn't offer an example or sum up examples you've already seen, and it introduces the whole point of this paragraph. You can clearly say that this is the topic sentence:

Throwing a fun Halloween party isn't very difficult as long as the host follows some basic guidelines.

What sentence should have come next? To figure this out, look to the **transitions** in each sentence. Transitions are the words, phrases, or sentences that clarify connections between ideas.

Words such as "first" and "finally" indicate connection and movement. They are key transition terms. See how the following sentence starts with "first?" That indicates that this is the first supporting example:

First, the host should make sure that the party invitation clearly informs guests about the dress code so that everyone shows up in costume.

The phrase "in addition" tells you that this is another piece that's being added to the support, so the sentence that would come next is:

In addition, the host should make sure that the decorations reflect the Halloween theme and therefore create a festive environment.

Therefore, the last supporting sentence is:

And of course, the host should have a ton of snacks and drinks prepared, and if those are also themed, that's even better.

Looking at the transition word “overall,” you can probably tell that the concluding sentence is:

Overall, setting up these elements will assure the host of a spooky and fun soiree.

That transition word says that this is going to cover what happened over all of the rest of the sentences.

Also, look at how it compares to the topic sentence. This summarizes what you’ve already been through in this TEE paragraph, whereas the topic sentence introduces what you’re going to go through.



TERMS TO KNOW

TEE Paragraphs

Paragraphs that relay a set of facts, explanations, and analysis; they contain a topic sentence, explanation, and examples.

Transitions

Words, phrases, or sentences that clarify connections between ideas.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you reviewed the **components of a paragraph**, and practiced the four big **organizational structures for paragraphs: spatial, chronological, emphatic, and TEE**.

Spatial paragraphs are used to examine details about a particular setting, person, or object; chronological paragraphs tell a story or series of events in the order that it happened; emphatic paragraphs organize their content based on importance; and TEE paragraphs provide a set of facts, explanations, and analysis through a topic sentence, explanation, and examples.

Finally, you played around with the TEE model a little, learning how to put together the examples and explanations, and how to organize this kind of paragraph using transition words.

Good luck!

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



TERMS TO KNOW

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