

THE SECRETS TO GOOD PARAGRAPH WRITING:

Four Essential Elements

Paragraph writing is the foundation of all essay writing, whether the form is expository, persuasive, narrative, or creative. In order to write a good paragraph, students need to understand the four essential elements of paragraph writing and how each element contributes to the whole. At Time4Writing, a certified teacher acts as an online writing tutor to help students build writing skills by focusing on the fundamentals. And nothing in the writing process is more fundamental than writing a solid paragraph.

The four elements essential to good paragraph writing are: **unity**, **order**, **coherence**, and **completeness**. The following example illustrates the importance of these elements in paragraph writing.

Before & After Comparison: From a wandering paragraph to a wonderful paragraph!

This example shows how one student approached the writing prompt “*What is your favorite day of the week and why?*” The original draft has some interesting ideas but overall, **the paragraph wanders**. It includes both relevant and irrelevant details and lacks the coherent focus required for a successful paragraph.

In Time4Writing courses, students are taught that the revision process is vital to writing successful paragraphs. They learn how to use this key step to eliminate unnecessary details and write a tightly structured paragraph.

Before – Original Draft

Sunday is my favorite day of the week. I like it because on Sunday, I watch football. On other days, I also get to watch football but not all day. There are other sports on other days to watch on TV. Sunday lunch is a favorite of mine because I eat with my father in front of the TV. All the other days, I have to eat at the table which is less fun. Some days my dad doesn't make it home from work until after I'm in bed. Some weeks my dad travels, and I don't see him for several days. The highlight of the day is when we watch the Dolphins play. Dad and I get so excited, we yell and cheer together. The thing that I like to do best in the world is watch TV with my dad.

Teacher Observations (Before)

The topic sentence restates the prompt but does not unify the paragraph.

The writer includes several irrelevant details.

The unifying idea in this paragraph is that the writer likes Sunday because it gives him/her a chance to be with his/her dad. However, the idea is buried in this draft.

After – Revised Draft

Sunday is my favorite day because I spend the day watching football with my dad. On Sunday, unlike the other days of the week when he works, my dad spends the whole day with me watching football on TV. We even eat lunch together while watching. The highlight of the day is watching the Dolphins game. Dad and I get so excited, we yell and cheer together. On Sundays, I get to combine watching my favorite sport and spending time with my favorite person—what a great day!

Teacher Observations (After)

The topic sentence connects the writing prompt with a summary of the main idea.

To keep the paragraph coherent, the most relevant details have been polished, and the others deleted.

The closing sentence summarizes the paragraph and emphasizes the main idea.

What is a Paragraph?

Paragraphs are comprised of sentences, but not random sentences. A paragraph is a group of sentences organized around a central topic. In fact, the cardinal rule of paragraph writing is to focus on one idea. A solidly written paragraph takes its readers on a clear path, without detours. Master the paragraph, and you'll be on your way to writing "gold-star" essays, term papers, and stories.

How to Write a Paragraph Using the Four Essential Elements

A basic paragraph structure usually consists of five sentences: the topic sentence, three supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. But the secrets to paragraph writing lay in four essential elements, which when used correctly, can make a *okay* paragraph into a *great* paragraph.

1. **Element #1: Unity.** Unity in a paragraph begins with the topic sentence. Every paragraph has one single, controlling idea that is expressed in its topic sentence, which is typically the first sentence of the paragraph. A paragraph is unified around this main idea, with the supporting sentences providing detail and discussion. In order to write a good topic sentence, think about your theme and all the points you want to make. Decide which point drives the rest, and then write it as your topic sentence.
2. **Element #2: Order.** Order refers to the way you organize your supporting sentences. Whether you choose chronological order, order of importance, or another logical

presentation of detail, a solid paragraph always has a definite organization. In a well-ordered paragraph, the reader follows along easily, aided by the pattern you've established. Order helps the reader grasp your meaning and avoid confusion.

3. **Element #3: Coherence.** Coherence is the quality that makes your writing understandable. Sentences within a paragraph need to connect to each other and work together as a whole. One of the best ways to achieve coherency is to use transition words. These words create bridges from one sentence to the next. You can use transition words that show order (first, second, third); spatial relationships (above, below) or logic (furthermore, in addition, in fact). Also, in writing a paragraph, using a consistent verb tense and point of view are important ingredients for coherency.
4. **Element #4: Completeness.** Completeness means a paragraph is well-developed. If all sentences clearly and sufficiently support the main idea, then your paragraph is complete. If there are not enough sentences or enough information to prove your thesis, then the paragraph is incomplete. Usually three supporting sentences, in addition to a topic sentence and concluding sentence, are needed for a paragraph to be complete. The concluding sentence or last sentence of the paragraph should summarize your main idea by reinforcing your topic sentence.

Writing Paragraph Prompts: Using the Four Essential Elements

Writing paragraphs takes practice, but what should students write about? Good paragraph writing prompts allow students to write about what they know and like, so their focus can be on the writing process and using the four essential elements. Paragraph writing prompts, such as *Explain why _____ is your favorite activity*, encourage students to develop a topic sentence, write supporting sentences in a proper order, use transition words to achieve coherency, and conclude their paragraphs for completeness.

Personal Training for Good Paragraph Writing

Students love **Time4Writing's** online writing courses because they help develop strong writing skills and a high level of comfort with the entire writing process. The online writing courses provide a personal approach for students because they work one-on-one with a certified teacher.

Time4Writing provides online writing classes for elementary, middle school, and high school students and pairs each student with a certified teacher for one-on-one writing instruction. Time4Writing's eight-week online writing courses are highly effective in helping students apply the writing process and build writing confidence. Learn more about Time4Writing's **elementary, middle school paragraph** and **high school online writing courses**.