

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of related sentences set off by a beginning indentation or, sometimes, by extra space. They provide relief from long sections of text, indicate changes in the development of your argument, and help organize and clarify ideas. Your text as a whole has a central idea which you present to your readers in a thesis statement. Similarly, each paragraph should have its topic sentence which then the rest of the paragraph develops into a sound argument.

Use of paragraphs:

- To introduce and give evidence for a main point supporting your essay's central idea => **thesis**
- To shift approach – from pros to cons, from problem to solution, etc.
- To mark movement in a sequence – from step one to step two

Other uses of paragraphs

- to introduce/conclude your essay
- to highlight an important point or a transition from one point to another

1) Paragraph Organization

Read the good-news letter. Note the predictable pattern of organization.

Dear Ms. Wong:

Greeting

Thank you for your interest in our university.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Dean of the Graduate School, I congratulate you on being accepted to the program in Aerospace Engineering to begin study at the master level. This letter is your official authorization to register for Fall 20XX. As a reflection of the importance the Graduate School places on the ability of its students to communicate effectively, the Graduate School requires all new students whose native language is not English to have their English evaluated. Specific details for this procedure are given in the enclosed information packet.

Good news

Administrative matters

We look forward to welcoming you to Midwestern University and wish you success in your academic career.

Welcoming close that points to the future

Sincerely,

Now read the bad-news letter, and label the four parts: greeting, preparation for bad news, bad news, and close. Where does the most important news appear? How does this compare to the good-news letter? How do the different purposes of the two letters influence the type and placement of information?

Dear Mr. Lee:

Thank you for your interest in the graduate program in Industrial and Operations Engineering. We have now finished our rigorous review process for Fall 20XX applications. We received an unusually high number of applications for the Fall term and we unfortunately had to limit the number we could accept. While your background is impressive, I regret to inform you that your application to the program has not been accepted. Given your excellent qualifications, I trust you will be able to pursue your academic interests elsewhere and wish you luck in your further endeavors.

Sincerely,

Draw boxes around and label the four parts of this problem-solution text (situation, problem, solution, and evaluation).

1) As standards of living rise and the world's population grows, the demands for freshwater have been increasing. **2)** Along with this increase is growing pressure to protect this precious resource. **3)** Efforts to protect the water supply have traditionally focused on regulating industrial and municipal waste that is discharged into rivers and lakes. **4)** However, in recent years researchers have identified a new threat to world freshwater supplies. **5)** Studies have identified in freshwater around the world a number of medicinal drugs, ranging from painkillers such as acetaminophen, to antibiotics, to cholesterol absorption inhibitors. **6)** These drugs easily enter the water supply when they are eliminated through digestion or improperly disposed of by directly flushing them down a toilet. **7)** Although the amount of these drugs in freshwater supplies is small (a few parts per billion or trillion), their impact on the freshwater supply and on human health has yet to be established. **8)** Given this uncertainty, efforts are underway to address this problem. **9)** One simple, inexpensive approach involves educating consumers about proper medication disposal methods. **10)** This effort involves educating consumers to be made aware that medicines should not be poured into a sink or flushed, but should be discarded through local drug collection programs. **11)** For example, many pharmacies collect unused or unwanted medicines and some communities have special medicine collection sites. **12)** With increased education, consumers can dispose of medication properly and help protect freshwater resources.

2) Focusing on central idea

Exercise: Finding the central idea

What is the central idea of the following paragraph? In what sentence or sentences is it expressed?

1) Though they do not know why the humpback whale sings, scientists do know something about the song itself. 2) They have measured the length of a whale's song: from a few minutes to over half an hour. 3) They have recorded and studied the variety and complex arrangements of low moans, high squeaks, and sliding squeals that make up the song. 4) And they have learned that each whale sings in its own unique pattern.

When revising your paragraphs for unity, always make sure you follow through your intended idea.

Exercise: Revising paragraph for unity

The following paragraph contains ideas or details that do not support its central idea. Identify the topic sentence of the paragraph and delete the unnecessary material

In the southern part of the state, some people still live much as they did a century ago. They use coal- or wood-burning stoves for heating and cooking. Their homes do not have electricity or indoor bathrooms or running water. The towns they live in don't receive adequate funding from the state and federal governments, so the schools are poor and in bad shape. Beside most homes there is a garden where fresh vegetables are gathered for canning. Small pastures nearby support livestock, including cattle, pigs, horses, and chickens. Most of the people have cars or trucks, but the vehicles are old and beat-up from traveling on unpaved roads.

Exercise: Writing a unified paragraph

Your task is to develop the topic sentence below into a unified paragraph by using the relevant information in the supporting statements. Delete each statement that does not relate directly to the topic, then rewrite and combine sentences as appropriate. Place the topic sentence in the order that seems the most effective to you.

Topic sentence: Mozart's accomplishments in music seem remarkable even today.

Supporting information:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in 1756 in Salzburg, Austria.

He began composing music at the age of five.

He lived most of his life in Salzburg and Vienna.

His first concert tour of Europe was at the age of six.

On his first tour he played harpsichord, organ, and violin.

He published numerous compositions before reaching adolescence.

He married in 1782.

Mozart and his wife were both poor managers of money.

They were plagued by debts.

Mozart composed over six hundred musical compositions.

His most notable works are his operas, symphonies, quartets, and piano concertos.

He died at the age of thirty-five.

Exercise: Developing topic sentences

Choose one of the following topic sentences and develop it into a detailed and unified paragraph at least 10 sentences long.

- 1) The most defining moment in my country's history was ...
- 2) The best Web search engine is [*name*].
- 3) The largest threat humanity will have to face is [*insert*]
- 4) One of the most important skills a person can have is [*insert*].
- 5) Working for good grades can interfere with learning.