

In this chapter, you will focus on the structure of a good paragraph. A **paragraph** is a group of related sentences that discusses one (and usually only one) main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences or more. The number of sentences is unimportant; however, the paragraph should be long enough to develop the main idea clearly. At the end of this chapter, you will write a well-structured paragraph on the topic of communication. For an example of a well-structured paragraph, look at the model.

ANALYZING THE MODEL

The writing model discusses communication styles.

Read the model. Then answer the questions.

Writing Model

1 2 3 4 5 6

Communication Styles That Don't Communicate

1 Studies show that certain styles of interpersonal communication are less effective than others. 2 Which styles are the ones to avoid? 3 These same studies indicate that the two least effective styles are aggressive and passive communication. 4 On the one hand, an aggressive style involves speaking in a disrespectful manner, expressing anger, or trying to dominate the conversation. 5 For example, a business executive might tell her coworker that his ideas for a new product are terrible. 6 Then she might interrupt him when he tries to explain his ideas. 7 This approach hinders successful communication. 8 It also creates barriers between people. 9 A passive communication style, on the other hand, can be equally unproductive. 10 A passive style might lead a person to hide his or her beliefs, speak quietly, and submit to all demands. 11 Someone working on a fashion design project, for instance, might agree to use a fabric that he thinks is unattractive. 12 He would not express his true feelings to the group. 13 In short, ineffective communicators can fail to influence others either by being too forceful or by hiding their opinions.

Questions about the Model

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph?
2. In which sentence does the writer state the main idea?
3. How does sentence 3 support the main idea?
4. What points does the writer make about an aggressive style?
5. In which sentence does the writer introduce an example of an aggressive style?
6. What points does the writer make about a passive style?
7. In which sentence does the writer introduce an example of a passive style?

Noticing Vocabulary: Word Families

Good writers use a wide range of vocabulary. You can quickly improve your vocabulary by studying **word families**. Word families are groups of words that are related. Words in a word family often have similar meanings but are different parts of speech. For example, notice the word *successful* in the model. The words *success*, *succeed*, *successful*, and *successfully* belong to the same word family.

PRACTICE 1 Identifying Words in Word Families

- A** Look at the writing model again. Find and underline the words in the chart. Then complete the chart. Use a dictionary as needed.

VERB	ADJECTIVE	ADVERB
-----	aggressive	<i>aggressively</i>
agree		
create		
-----	disrespectful	
dominate		
influence		
-----	passive	
submit		
-----	unproductive	
use		

- B** Notice the word endings in the chart in Part A. List the ending(s) for each part of speech.

Verbs: -ate

Adjectives: _____

Adverbs: _____

PARTS OF A PARAGRAPH

Paragraphs generally include three parts. All paragraphs have a **topic sentence** and **supporting sentences**. Most paragraphs also have a **concluding sentence**.

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

Every good paragraph has a topic sentence. A topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph.

The topic sentence briefly indicates what the paragraph is going to discuss. For this reason, the topic sentence is a helpful guide to both the writer and the reader. The writer can see what information to include (and what information to exclude). The reader can see what the paragraph is going to be about and is therefore better prepared to understand it. For example, in the writing model, the topic sentence alerts the reader to look for communication styles that are ineffective.

Here are three important points to remember about a topic sentence:

- A topic sentence is a **complete sentence**; that is, it contains at least one subject and one verb. These examples are not complete sentences because they do not contain a subject and a verb:

INCOMPLETE Communicating with colleagues.

INCOMPLETE How to improve online social networks.

- A topic sentence contains two parts: a **topic** and a **controlling idea**. It names the topic and then limits the topic to a specific area to be discussed in the space of a single paragraph.

TOPIC CONTROLLING IDEA
Communication with colleagues requires sensitivity and understanding.

TOPIC CONTROLLING IDEA
Improving online social networks can help professionals communicate.

- A topic sentence is the most general statement in the paragraph because it gives only the topic and the controlling idea. It does not give any specific details.

This is a general statement that could serve as a topic sentence:

The Arabic origin of many English words is not always obvious.

This sentence is *too general*. It doesn't provide much guidance about what the paragraph will be about.

English has been influenced by other languages.

On the other hand, this sentence is *too specific*. It could serve as a supporting sentence but not as a topic sentence.

The slang expression *so long* (meaning "good-bye") is probably a corruption of the Arabic *salaam*.

The Position of Topic Sentences

The topic sentence is usually (but not always) the first sentence in a paragraph. Experienced writers sometimes put topic sentences in other locations, but the best spot is usually right at the beginning. Readers who are used to the English way of writing want to know what they will read about as soon as they begin reading.

Synonyms, words with the same basic meaning, do not always have the same emotional meaning. For example, *stingy* and *frugal* both mean "careful with money." However, calling someone stingy is an insult, but calling someone frugal is usually a compliment. Similarly, a person wants to be slender but not skinny. Therefore, you should be careful in choosing words as many so-called synonyms are not completely synonymous.

At times, a topic sentence comes at the end of the paragraph. In this case, the paragraph might begin with a series of examples or facts. Then the topic sentence at the end would be the conclusion drawn from these examples or facts.

Mediation is now a popular way to solve disagreements between children in school. A mediator can also help a divorcing couple discuss finances or improve communication between employees and company executives. These are a few ways that mediators can help opposing parties come to agreement.

PRACTICE 2

Choosing Topic Sentences

Decide which sentence in each group is the best topic sentence and label it *best*. Then look at the other sentences in the group and label them *TG* (too general), *TS* (too specific), or *I* (incomplete).

GROUP 1

- TS a. A lunar eclipse is an omen of a coming disaster.
- TG b. Superstitions have been around forever.
- best c. People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon.
- I d. Is made of green cheese.

GROUP 2

- _____ a. The history of astronomy is interesting.
- _____ b. Ice Age people recorded the appearance of new moons by making scratches in animal bones.
- _____ c. For example, Stonehenge in Britain was built 3,500 years ago to track the movement of the sun.
- _____ d. Ancient people recorded lunar and solar events in different ways.

GROUP 3

- _____ a. It is hard to know which foods are safe to eat nowadays.
- _____ b. In some large ocean fish, there are high levels of mercury.
- _____ c. Undercooked chicken and hamburger may carry *E. coli* bacteria.
- _____ d. Not to mention mad cow disease.
- _____ e. Food safety is an important issue.

GROUP 4

- _____ a. Hybrid automobiles more economical to operate than gasoline-powered cars.
- _____ b. The new hybrid automobiles are very popular.
- _____ c. Hybrid cars have good fuel economy because a computer under the hood decides to run the electric motor, the small gasoline engine, or the two together.
- _____ d. The new hybrid automobiles are popular because of their fuel economy.

PRACTICE 3

Recognizing Topic Sentences

Read the sentences in each group and decide which is the topic sentence. Label it TS (topic sentence). (*Hint: Remember that the topic sentence is the most general statement in a paragraph.*)

PARAGRAPH 1

- _____ a. A notes / memo function lets you make quick notes to yourself.
- _____ b. Other capabilities include word processing, spreadsheets, and email.
- _____ c. A voice recorder that uses a built-in microphone and speaker works like a tape recorder.
- _____ d. Basic tools include an appointment calendar, an address book, to-do lists, and a calculator.
- _____ e. MP3 playback lets you listen to digital music files, and a picture viewer lets you look at digital photos.
- _____ f. Most smart phones have tools for basic tasks as well as for multimedia functions.
- _____ g. A few models also include a built-in digital camera and keyboard.

PARAGRAPH 2

- _____ a. Twelve years after *Sputnik*, the United States caught up by becoming the first nation to land a man on the moon.
- _____ b. The Europeans have joined the competition, vowing to land European astronauts on the moon by 2025 and on Mars by 2035.
- _____ c. The number of nations competing in the "space race" has grown since the early days of space exploration.
- _____ d. China joined the competition in 2003 when it launched *Shenzhou 5*.
- _____ e. Initially, the former Soviet Union took the lead when it sent the first man into Earth orbit in the spaceship *Sputnik* in 1957.
- _____ f. For almost 50 years, the United States and Russia were the only competitors in the contest to explore space using manned spacecraft.

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PARAGRAPH 3

- _____ a. Another important change was that people had the freedom to live and work wherever they wanted.
- _____ b. The earliest significant change was for farming families, who were no longer isolated.
- _____ c. The final major change brought by the automobile was the building of superhighways, suburbs, huge shopping centers, and theme parks such as Disney World in Florida.
- _____ d. The automobile revolutionized the way of life in the United States.
- _____ e. The automobile enabled them to drive to towns and cities comfortably and conveniently.
- _____ f. In fact, people could work in a busy metropolitan city and drive home to the quiet suburbs.

PARAGRAPH 4

- _____ a. In time, this melted part rises as magma¹.
- _____ b. The formation of a volcanic eruption is a dramatic series of events.
- _____ c. As the plate² sinks, friction and Earth's heat cause part of it to melt.
- _____ d. The magma produces heat, steam, and pressure.
- _____ e. First of all, most volcanoes are formed where two plates collide³.
- _____ f. Then one of the plates is forced under the other and sinks.
- _____ g. When the heat, steam, and pressure from the magma finally reach the surface of Earth, a volcanic eruption occurs.

The Two Parts of a Topic Sentence

As noted earlier, a topic sentence has two essential parts: the topic and the controlling idea. The topic names the subject of the paragraph. The controlling idea limits or controls the topic to a specific area that you can discuss in the space of a single paragraph.

The reader immediately knows that this paragraph will discuss how easy it is to prepare convenience foods and perhaps will give some examples (canned soup, frozen dinners, and so on).

_____ TOPIC _____ CONTROLLING IDEA _____
Convenience foods are easy to prepare.

The reader of this topic sentence expects to read about various ethnic foods popular in the United States: tacos, egg rolls, sushi, baklava, pizza, and so on.

_____ CONTROLLING IDEA _____ TOPIC _____
Immigrants have contributed many delicious foods to U.S. cuisine.

¹ magma: hot melted rock below the surface of the Earth

² plate: one of the very large sheets of rock that forms the surface of the Earth

³ collide: (to) crash violently into someone or something

A topic sentence should not have controlling ideas that are unrelated. The three parts of the controlling idea in this topic sentence are too unrelated for a single paragraph. They require three separate paragraphs to explain fully.

TOO MANY IDEAS Advanced communication technologies have improved dramatically, and they have also enhanced business relationships and nurtured social interactions.

GOOD Advanced communication technologies have improved dramatically.

PRACTICE 4

Identifying the Topic and Controlling Idea

Read each sentence. Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea.

1. Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.
2. Driving on freeways requires strong nerves.
3. Driving on freeways sometimes requires an aggressive attitude.
4. The Caribbean island of Trinidad attracts tourists because of its calypso music.
5. Spectacular beaches make Puerto Rico a tourist paradise.
6. Moving away from home can be a stressful experience for young people.
7. Owning an automobile is a necessity for me.
8. It is an expensive luxury to own an automobile in a large city.
9. A major problem for many students is the high cost of tuition and books.
10. Participating in class discussions can be a problem for some students.

PRACTICE 5

Writing Topic Sentences

- A** Write a topic sentence for each paragraph with a topic and a controlling idea.

PARAGRAPH 1

_____ English speakers relaxing at home, for example, may put on *kimonos*, which is a Japanese word. English speakers who live in a warm climate may take an afternoon *siesta* on an outdoor *patio* without realizing that these are Spanish words. They may even relax on a *chaise* while snacking on *yogurt*, words of French and Turkish origin, respectively. At night, they may *shampoo* their hair and put on *pajamas*, words from the Hindi language of India.

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PARAGRAPH 2

_____ In many European universities, students are not required to attend classes. In fact, professors in some countries generally do not know the names of the students enrolled in their courses. In the United States, however, students are required to attend all classes and may be penalized if they do not. Furthermore, in the European system, students usually take just one comprehensive examination at the end of their entire four or five years of study. In the North American system, on the other hand, students usually have numerous quizzes, tests, and homework assignments, and they almost always have to take a final examination in each course at the end of each semester.

PARAGRAPH 3

_____ For example, the Eskimos, living in a treeless region of snow and ice, sometimes build temporary homes out of thick blocks of ice. People who live in deserts, on the other hand, use the most available materials, mud or clay, which provide good insulation from the heat. In Northern Europe, Russia, and other areas of the world where forests are plentiful, people usually construct their homes out of wood. In the islands of the South Pacific, where there is an abundant supply of bamboo and palm, people use these tough, fibrous plants to build their homes.

- B** On a separate sheet of paper, write two or three topic sentences for each topic. Each topic sentence should have a different controlling idea.

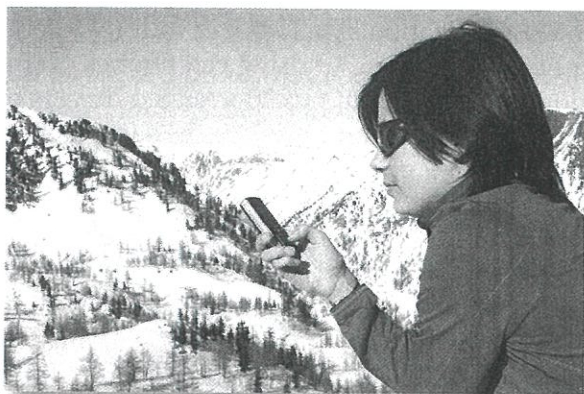
TOPICS

- Cell phones
- Text messaging
- Online social networks
- Movies
- Advertising

EXAMPLE

Topic: cell phones

- Topic sentences: 1. Using a cell phone while driving can be dangerous.
2. There are cell phone manners that everyone should know.
3. Cell phones have changed the way we communicate.



Communication today is instantly possible from almost anywhere.

TRY IT OUT!

Work in a small group. Choose three topics that interest you. Be sure that they are different topics from the ones in Practice 5B. Write a topic sentence for each one. Be sure to include a controlling idea.

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

Supporting sentences explain or prove the topic sentence. One of the biggest problems in student writing is that student writers often fail to support their ideas adequately. You need to use specific details to be thorough and convincing.

There are several kinds of specific supporting details such as examples, facts and statistics, and quotations.

PRACTICE 6

Identifying Supporting Details

Work with a partner. Read two versions of the same paragraph. Then answer the questions.

VERSION 1: PARAGRAPH WITHOUT SUPPORT

Cell Phones and Driving

1 Many governments are responding aggressively to the threat that cell phones pose to safety on the road. 2 Cell phones cause accidents all the time. 3 Sometimes people are injured and have to go to the hospital. 4 People don't pay attention while they are talking on the phone, so they run into other cars. 5 A lot of governments are tired of dealing with the problem. 6 If you are caught with a cell phone while driving, you might have to pay a fine. 7 In conclusion, driving while on the phone is a bad idea.

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Cell Phones and Driving

1 Many governments are responding aggressively to the threat that cell phones pose to safety on the road. 2 In 2009, almost 1,000 automobile deaths occurred in the United States alone because drivers were distracted by cellular phones (Snyder). 3 Cell phone use increases the chance of an accident resulting in hospitalization by a factor of four (Nikkel). 4 These problems can be blamed on the fact that using cell phones dramatically slows drivers' reaction times. 5 "If you put 20-year-old drivers behind the wheel with a cell phone, their reaction times are the same as 70-year-old drivers who are not using a cell phone," said University of Utah psychology professor David Strayer. 6 "It's like instantly aging a large number of drivers (Britt)." 7 Because studies show that the use of cell phones while driving is so dangerous, it has been banned in dozens of countries around the world. 8 For example, in Australia, Bahrain, the United Kingdom, and Brazil, drivers are now required to pay a fine if they are caught texting or talking on a mobile device. 9 Governments are hopeful that these laws will lead to safer communication practices and fewer fatal accidents.

Sources:

1. Britt, Robert Roy. "Drivers on Cell Phones Kill Thousands, Snarl Traffic."
2. Edgar Snyder & Associates. "Cell Phone Texting and Accident Statistics."
3. Nikkel, Cathy. "Notes from the Road."

Questions about the Paragraphs

1. What is the topic sentence of each paragraph? Circle the topic. Underline the controlling idea.
2. Which supporting sentences in Version 2 contain these details? Write the sentence numbers.

An example: _____ A statistic: _____ A quotation: _____
3. How do the details in Version 2 improve the paragraph? Write your ideas on a separate sheet of paper.

Opinions vs. Facts

When supporting your ideas, it is important to distinguish between facts and opinions. **Opinions** are subjective statements based on a person's beliefs or attitudes as in these examples:

Women are better communicators than men.

Smoking is a bad habit.

English is an easy language to learn.

Opinions are not acceptable as support. It is certainly suitable to express opinions in academic writing. In fact, most professors want you to express your own ideas. However, you may not use an opinion as support, and if you express an opinion, you must support it with facts. **Facts** are objective statements of truths.

At sea level, water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.

Women live longer than men.

Cigarettes are addictive.

Sometimes even facts need proof. While all three statements above are facts, the last two need proof. Your readers may not believe that women live longer than men, or they may not agree that cigarettes are addictive. You have to use specific supporting details such as examples, statistics, and quotations to prove that these statements are true facts.

OPINION Photographs of ultrathin fashion models send the wrong message to girls and young women.

FACT BUT
NEEDS PROOF Fashion models are extremely thin.

SPECIFIC SUPPORTING
DETAIL The average model weighs 23 percent less than the average woman of the same height.

Using Examples as Support

Examples are perhaps the easiest kind of supporting detail to use because you can often take examples from your own knowledge and experience. You don't always have to search the library or the Internet for supporting material. Furthermore, examples make your writing lively and interesting, and your reader is more likely to remember your point if you support it with a memorable example.

Words and phrases that introduce examples include *for example*, *for instance*, and *such as*. See Transition Signals on pages 31–34 in Chapter 2 for more information about introducing examples.

PRACTICE 7 Using Specific Supporting Details

- A** Read each sentence and label it **O** (opinion), **F-NP** (fact that needs proof), or **SSD** (specific supporting detail).

- F-NP 1. People who steal identities do a lot of damage before their victims become aware of it. (*The writer could give an example of a person who was victimized before noticing it.*)
- O 2. Punishment for identity thieves is not severe enough. (*The writer could give an example of a typical punishment.*)
- SSD 3. As of 2010, credit card fraud accounted for 17 percent of reported identity theft.
- _____ 4. Identity theft is more serious than any other type of theft.
- _____ 5. Identity theft is increasing at a rapid pace.

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- _____ 6. In 2000, 31,000 cases of identity theft were reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC); in 2009, the number was 278,000.
- _____ 7. Many people do not report identity theft to the police.
- _____ 8. In 2009, 28 percent of identity theft victims did not notify the police, according to the FTC.
- _____ 9. Identity theft happens to ordinary people, not just to the wealthy.
- _____ 10. It is easy for a thief to use the U.S. Postal Service to steal identities.
- _____ 11. For example, thieves steal credit card statements from mailboxes, and then send a change-of-address card to the postal service to have future statements sent to a different address.
- _____ 12. Most victims of identity theft are young adults.
- _____ 13. The FTC reports that there were more victims in the age group 20–29 than in any other group.
- _____ 14. The police should do more to protect citizens from identity theft.

B Work with a partner or in a small group. Discuss what specific supporting details you might use to support the sentences you labeled *O* and *F-NP*.

THE CONCLUDING SENTENCE

A concluding sentence serves two purposes: It signals the end of the paragraph, and reminds the reader of the important ideas. It can do this either by summarizing the main points of the paragraph or by repeating the topic sentence in different words (paraphrasing).

A paragraph does not always need a concluding sentence. For example, not every paragraph in a multi-paragraph essay needs one. However, for single paragraphs, especially long ones, a concluding sentence is helpful to the reader because it is a reminder of the important points.

Never introduce a new idea in the concluding sentence. For example if this sentence were in a paragraph about different kinds of greeting cards, adding a comment about the cost of cards would add a new idea.

In conclusion, we now have a greater variety of greeting cards to choose from, but they are also becoming very expensive.

You may want to begin your concluding sentence with one of the signals in this list. You may also end a paragraph without a formal signal.

END-OF-PARAGRAPH SIGNALS		
Followed by a Comma		Not Followed by a Comma
In brief,	Lastly,	The evidence suggests that . . .
In conclusion,	Therefore,	There can be no doubt that . . .
Indeed,	Thus,	These examples show that . . .
In short,	To sum up,	We can see that . . .
Finally,		

Read the paragraphs. Decide whether each concluding sentence summarizes the main points or repeats the topic sentence in different words. Then answer the questions.

PARAGRAPH 1**Greeting Cards**

Have you noticed how many different kinds of greeting cards you can buy these days? In the old days, the local drugstore had one rack displaying maybe five or six basic kinds of cards. You could walk into the store and choose an appropriate card in five minutes or less. Today, however, the display space for greeting cards is as big as a soccer field, and it may take an hour or two to hunt down the right card with exactly the right message. There are at least 30 categories of birthday cards alone: birthday cards for different ages, from different ages, for different relatives, from different relatives, for different genders, from different genders, from a couple, from the office, for dog owners, for cat owners, and so on. There are cards for getting a job, for retiring from a job, for acquiring a pet, for losing a pet, for becoming engaged, for breaking up. There are also greeting cards to send for no reason—"Thinking of you" or "Just because" cards. The newest type of card is the "encouragement card." An encouragement card offers comforting thoughts and helpful advice to someone who is sad or distressed in these troubled times. These examples clearly show that these days there is a greeting card for every possible life event and for a few nonevents as well.

PARAGRAPH 2**A Hawaiian Legend**

Native people create legends to explain unusual phenomena in their environment. A legend from the Hawaiian island of Kauai explains how the naupaka flower, a flower that grows on beaches there, got its unusual shape. The flower looks like half a small daisy—there are petals on one side only. The legend says that the marriage of two young lovers on the island was opposed by both sets of parents. The parents found the couple together on a beach one day, and to prevent them from being together, one of the families moved to the mountains, separating the young couple forever. As a result, the naupaka flower separated itself into two halves. One half moved to the mountains, and the other half stayed near the beach. This story is a good example of a legend invented by native people to interpret the world around them.

Questions about the Paragraphs

1. In which paragraph does the concluding sentence summarize the main points of the paragraph, which are not specifically stated in the topic sentence?
2. In which paragraph does the concluding sentence paraphrase (repeat in different words) the topic sentence?
3. What are the conclusion signals in each paragraph? Circle them.

Writing Concluding Sentences

Read the paragraphs and underline the topic sentences. Then add a good concluding sentence to each paragraph by paraphrasing the topic sentence or summarizing the main points. Remember to use an end-of-paragraph signal.

PARAGRAPH 1

A person can be a good communicator by being a good listener. When speaking with someone, a good listener pays close attention to the speaker's words while looking at his or her face. A good listener also shows interest by smiling and nodding. Also, posture is important; it can affect communication for both the speaker and the listener. For instance, sitting slumped in a chair makes a person seem passive, while a relaxed posture with the body bent slightly forward shows interest in the speaker and the conversation. Remember, too, that good communicators do not interrupt while someone is speaking; although interruption is active participation, it can be impolite. _____

PARAGRAPH 2

Modern communication technology is raising the stress level for corporate workers. They feel buried under the large number of messages they receive daily. In addition to telephone calls, office workers receive dozens of email, voice mail, and text messages daily. In fact, U.S. managers receive on average more than 200 email messages a day. Because they do not have enough time to respond to these messages during office hours, it is common for them to do so in the evenings or on weekends at home. _____
