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Unit 2 Paragraph Structure



Learning Focus

After learning this Unit, you will be able to:

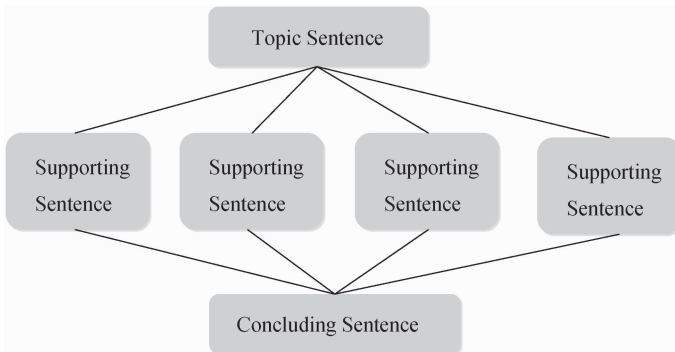
- ✦ learn about the basic structure of a paragraph;
- ✦ understand requirements of topic sentence writing;
- ✦ master the ways of supporting sentence writing;
- ✦ know functions of concluding sentence.

A paragraph is a complete unit of thought in which a group of related sentences work together to put across a single idea. Therefore only a group of correct sentences put together is not a paragraph. That is to say, a paragraph is a complete unit of thought in which a group of related sentences work together to develop a single topic.

Module 1 Basic Structure of a Paragraph

In fact, a well-written paragraph is a mini essay normally consisting of three main parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence. Usually the topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph and provides an indication of how the paragraph will be developed. All the other sentences, called supporting sentences, are closely related to this topic sentence. They serve to develop or explain the topic sentence. The concluding sentence is usually the last sentence of the paragraph that rounds off the idea and links it to the next paragraph.

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Sample 1

(1) Bamboo has many uses.	Sentence (1) is the topic sentence which states the main idea of the paragraph.
(2) Many people use it to make chairs, tables, curtains, bird cages and so on. (3) Its tender young shoots can be eaten. (4) The soft pulp inside the stems can be made into a fine paper.	In this paragraph, Sentence (2) (3) (4) are supporting sentences which develop the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples and facts.
(5) No wonder people say bamboo is a useful plant.	Sentence (5) is the concluding sentence which ends the paragraph by restating the topic and makes a strong impression on the reader.



Sample 2

(1) The English textbook in use is a desirable one.	Sentence (1) is the topic sentence which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. It tells the reader what this paragraph is about and limits the paragraph to a specific aspect that should be discussed.
(2) It is helpful to the students in several ways. (3) First, its reading passages and exercises are designed in such a way that the necessary reading skills are presented and practiced in an orderly way and step by step. (4) Second, the section of writing practice is so designed that the points illustrated in this section are clarified, detailed and practical. (5) The students can study the writing techniques independently and improve their writing skills steadily. (6) Third, the textbook contains a reasonable number of new words and expressions, and many of them are frequently repeated in the passages, which makes it easy for the students to memorize the most useful words and expressions.	Sentence (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) are supporting sentences which develop the topic sentence from three points by “First”, “Second” and “Third”.

(7) The textbook, indeed, provides the students with enough intellectual challenge and helps the students to improve their skills of the English language.

Sentence (7) is the concluding sentence which ends the paragraph by summary.

Module 2 Topic Sentence

A good topic sentence includes a stated topic and a controlling idea. The stated topic first introduces the subject of the paragraph. The other part of the topic sentence, called controlling idea, states the subject and limits the topic to a specific aspect that can be discussed completely in a paragraph. The rest sentences in the paragraph should be related to and develop the controlling idea, so the controlling idea is the main part of the topic sentence.

The organs of the human body are interdependent and interrelated.

Stated topic

controlling idea

Education plays a vital role in building a powerful and prosperous country.

Stated topic

controlling idea

1. Requirements of the topic sentences writing

Since a topic sentence controls each paragraph. It is very important and helpful for beginners to write a topic sentence because it gives them the guidance they need in writing. All well-written topic sentences share four characteristics:

- ✦ It must be a complete sentence, usually an indicative sentence, not a phrase, which can express a complete thought.
- ✦ It is not too general and not too specific.
- ✦ It cannot deal with too much information.
- ✦ The controlling idea of the topic sentence should be some key words expressing the main idea. It can be a single word, a phrase or a clause.

Improper: How to register for college classes. (a phrase)

Proper: Registering for college classes can be a frustrating experience for new students.

Improper: Huang Shan Mountain is in Anhui province. (too specific, no room for development)

Proper: Huang Shan Mountain in Anhui province is noted for its breathtaking view.

Improper: I like travel by all means of transportation. (too general)

Proper: My choice of traveling by train is based on the following three reasons.

Improper: American food is tasteless and greasy because Americans use too many canned, frozen, and prepackaged foods and because everything is fried in oil or butter. (too much information)

Proper: American food is tasteless and greasy.

2. The placement of the topic sentence

There is no fix position for the topic sentence. Topic sentences are easily identified and popular when they appear as the first sentence in the paragraph, but experienced writers sometimes place it in the middle, or at the end of the paragraph, even imply it in the paragraph.

★ Topic sentence at the beginning

A topic sentence often appears at the beginning of a paragraph. Such a paragraph pattern has obvious advantages because it is easier for both a reader and a writer. It not only helps writers to prevent random ideas from appearing in the paragraph, but also makes the reader more easily know what the paragraph intends to discuss and examine the supporting details that follow. It is the most useful way for a student to begin practicing English writing.

Sample 3

Many countries helped to develop the automobile. The internal-combustion engine was invented in Austria, and France was an early leader in automobile manufacturing, but it was in the United States after 1900 that automobile was improved most rapidly. As a large and growing country, the United States needed cars and trucks to provide transportation in places not served by trains.	The topic sentence is at the beginning in the sample.
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★ The topic sentence in the middle of the paragraph

Topic sentence sometimes appears in the middle of paragraphs following introductory descriptive details. All these details are clearly related to the topic sentence, which can draw a conclusion from preceding material and suggests that more will follow. The middle position is especially appropriate when two things are compared.



Sample 4

Just as I settle down to read or watch television, he demands that I play with him. If I get a telephone call, he screams in the background or knocks something over. I always have to hang up to find out what's wrong with him. **Baby-sitting with my little brother is no fun.** He refuses to let me eat a snack in peace. Usually he wants half of whatever I have to eat. Then, when he finally grows tired, it takes about an hour for him to fall asleep.

The topic sentence is in the middle of the paragraph in the sample.

✦ The topic sentence at the end of the paragraph

Placing a topic sentence at the end of the paragraph, the writer can build up a feeling of suspense which tastes the readers into continuing to the end to find out the main point. Usually the author first states some details; then explains his point and finally summarizes with a topic sentence.



Sample 5

Recent research has shown that a baby learns to recognize its mother's voice while it is still in the womb, probably from voice resonance through the mother's body. A four-day-old baby can distinguish the speech patterns of its native tongue from a foreign language. At four months, babies can recognize lip movements associated with vowel sounds. Before their first birthday, they are beginning to associate words with meanings; by eighteen months, they have the beginnings of a vocabulary, at two years old, they will have expanded in the case of girls to up to 2,000 words. **Both intellectually and physically, this is an awesome achievement compared to the learning abilities of an adult.**

The topic sentence is at the end of the paragraph in the sample.

✦ No topic sentences in the paragraph

Some paragraphs contain only an implied topic sentence, but no stated sentence at all. A topic sentence is normally unnecessary because each sentence in the paragraph contributes to the central idea.



Sample 6

First, blood carries substances needed to maintain and repair the body tissues. In this way, blood serves as a provider. Second, blood also serves as a disposer, since it carries wastes and gases away from the tissues of the body. In addition, blood acts as a defender. The white corpuscle in the bloodstream constantly guard against and try to destroy bacteria and other agents that threaten the body's welfare.

In the sample, there is no verbally expressed topic sentence. But we can infer from the existing sentences that the implied topic sentence is: Blood serves our body in three important ways.

✦ Double topic sentences

When topic sentence appears both at the beginning and the end of the paragraph, the double topic sentences put an emphasis on the central idea of the paragraph, but also help the readers have good understanding. In this case the double topic sentences have the same aim to hold the supporting sentences in the paragraph.



Sample 7

Synonyms, words that have the same basic meaning, do not always have the same emotional meaning. For example, the words “stingy” and “frugal” both mean “careful with money”. However, to call a person stingy is an insult, while the word frugal has a much more positive connotation. Similarly, a person wants to be slender but not skinny, and aggressive but not pushy. **Therefore, you should be careful in choosing words because many so-called synonyms are not really synonymous at all.**

There are two topic sentences in the sample.

Module 3

Supporting Sentence

As discussed earlier, in any well-written paragraph supporting sentences should help explain or support the central idea expressed in the topic sentence. They should also be presented in a systematic way so as to logically develop the idea. Any sentences, phrases, or words that do not support the topic should be cut out because they weaken the unity of the paragraph. Normally there are more than two supporting sentences. To write a good paragraph, we should pay special

attention to requirements of supporting sentences writing.

1. Supporting sentences should develop or illustrate the topic adequately.

Supporting sentences are also called developing sentences. They should be closely relevant to the topic sentence. They serve to back up, clarify, explain the main idea with factual details, examples or statistics which may come from magazines, journals, newspapers, books even our experience. Any details that fail to support the topic is not suitable in the paragraph because they weaken the unity of the paragraph.



Sample 8

Topic Sentence: My room is cozy and has everything I need. (1) It is small but has enough space for my things. (2) It has a big window with a view of a beautiful pine tree where there are often birds twittering. (3) The landlord is not very pleasant. (4) It's nice and warm in winter. (5) It has a big desk and a large shelf for my books.	Sentences (1) (2) (4) and (5) support the main idea that "My room is cozy and has everything I need." However, sentence (3) does not support the topic sentence and it weakens the unity of the paragraph. So it should be left out, or it should be taken up in a separate paragraph if the writer really wants to say something about it.
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Sample 9

Topic Sentence: The Women's Movement has had several effects on the English language. (1) It has created Ms. , a title for women comparable to Mr. for men. (2) The Movement has changed the ending of several compound words from man to person. (3) The Movement is responsible for some new terms. (4) The Movement has had an effect on the third-person singular pronoun.	This paragraph is a sufficiently developed paragraph. The main point is clear: The Women's Movement has had several effects on the English language. The writer develops supporting sentences for this point by using several specific examples (create Ms. and new terms, change the ending of compound words, have effect on the third-person singular pronoun).
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2. Supporting sentences should be connected logically.

A paragraph is just as a mini-essay, so it is not enough just to have a specific topic. It needs a reasonable connection. The reasonable arrangement or sequence between supporting sentences in

a paragraph is especially important because the connection between them conforms to logical relation, grammar rules and usage. They make the paragraph coherent and unity.



Sample 10

John goes through the same morning routine every weekday. He shaves, brushes his teeth, washes his face, and dresses. He has breakfast and reads the morning newspaper. At six, he is wakened by alarm clock and gets up. At seven thirty he says goodbye to his family and leaves for his office. He exercises deep breathing in the garden for ten minutes.	In the sample, sentences are presented in illogical order because of the poor connection of the parts, ideas of the paragraph cannot move forward smoothly. To achieve better understanding, we need to make sentences so well-ordered and fitted that they cohere or hang together.
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Sample 11

John goes through the same morning routine every weekday. At six, he is wakened by alarm clock and gets up. Then he shaves, brushes his teeth, washes his face, and dresses. After that he exercises deep breathing in the garden for ten minutes. Then he has breakfast and reads the morning newspaper. At seven thirty he says goodbye to his family and leaves for his office.	In the sample, the revised arrangement, the first sentence serves as the topic sentence. The following 5 sentences are supporting sentences which center around the main idea of the paragraph stated in the topic sentence. The whole paragraph flows smoothly from sentence to sentence so that we can easily follow the writer's thought.
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Module 4

Concluding Sentence

A concluding sentence appears at the end of a paragraph and sends a clear signal to the reader that the writer has completed the discussion. The concluding sentence summarizes the main point of the paragraph just as the topic sentence does. Very often, it is a repetition of the topic sentence in different words. However, not all paragraphs should have a concluding sentence, especially if the paragraph is very short. It is up to the writer to decide when a concluding sentence is necessary.



Sample 12

My choice of travelling by train is based on the following three reasons. Firstly, traveling by train is the safest way for a long distance journey. Seldom have we heard of train accident because train runs on tracks and is hardly affected by weather. Secondly, it is very economic to travel by train. Train tickets won't cost so much as that of air flight, and traveling by train saves much more time than sitting in a bus. Finally, we feel much more comfortable to sit in a train that is spacious and offers a good view of the landscape outside the window.

In the sample, the topic sentence appears at the beginning of the paragraph. The following five sentences are supporting sentences which center around the main idea: “reasons for travelling by train” stated in the topic sentence. Without the concluding sentence, the whole paragraph still flows smoothly from sentence to sentence.

A concluding sentence usually performs the following functions:

1. To give a brief summary—the easiest and most common way to end a paragraph.



Sample 13

Plants are very important living things. Life could not go on if there were no plants. This is because plants can make food from air, water and sunlight. Animal and man cannot make food from air, water and sunlight. Animals get their food by eating plants and other animals. Man gets his food by eating plants and animals too. **Therefore, animals and man need plants in order to live.**

In the sample, the concluding sentence sums up the paragraph—animals and man need plants in order to live.

2. To restate the topic—more emphasis on the topic.



Sample 14

The cafeteria food is terrible in our campus. First of all, the mashed potatoes could be used to make a collage. Next, the meat must be cut in small pieces because it's too tough to chew. Finally, the vegetables are cooked so long you can't tell the string beans from the spinach. **In short, our school cafeteria serves food that is unfit for student consumption.**

In the sample, the concluding sentence restates the topic—the school cafeteria serves food that is unfit for student consumption.

3. To call for sort of action—making the reader take some measures to solve a problem.



Sample 15

In modern society, there is often a lack of understanding between parents and children. Parents dislike what their children think and do, while children often complain that their parents cannot understand them. There are some reasons for the existence of generation gap. First, the environment in which young people now live is quite different from that in which their parents grew up. Therefore, they often hold different opinions on various problems in life. Second, disparity in age also leads to misunderstanding. Young people want to do everything as they like, while older people often cannot help interfering when they think what the young people are doing is wrong. This inevitably leads to disharmony. **However, generation gap can be bridged as long as both parents and children are willing to make efforts to have open talks to each other.**

In the sample, the concluding sentence tries to solve the problem of generation gap—both parents and children have open talks to each other.

4. To end with a warning—presenting a warning or suggestion to the reader.



Sample 16

Population explosion is one of the greatest disasters in the world today. It results in many serious problems: As there are more and more and mouths to be fed, there comes a great strain on food and many people have to face the problem of malnutrition and starvation. Also, the fast growth of over crowding, for example, slums, the areas of disease, dirt, and crimes, have rapidly grown around big cities. Thirdly, population pressures have caused strained resources, and the earth's biological systems have already been stretched to the breaking point. **If the explosion continues at the rate it does, human being will face the danger of self destruction.**

In the sample, the concluding sentence presents a warning to the reader—human being will face the danger of self destruction.

Module 5 Simulating Operations

I. Point out the controlling idea of each topic sentence.

1. The desire for good health is universal.
2. There are obvious differences between high school life and college life.
3. Education plays a very important role in the modernization of our country.
4. Many students appreciate the conveniences of living alone in a rented room.
5. An ideal teacher should be the students' intimate friend after class.

II. Identify each sentence that doesn't support the topic sentence.

1. Topic sentence: The weather has been changeable.
 - A. On Sunday we had a high wind that blew down some trees.
 - B. Monday was so cold that we had to turn on the heat and wear out winter coats.
 - C. On Tuesday we formed a group to go roller skating.
 - D. On Wednesday the weather cleared and the sun came out.
 - E. Thursday was as hot and humid as an August day.
 - F. Friday morning it began to rain, and it looks as if we'll have a cold, steady wind for a few days.

2. Topic sentence: The issue of business being conducted over the Internet raises important security issues.

A. Companies doing business over the Internet must have very sophisticated security measures in place so that information such as credit card, bank account, and social security

numbers cannot be accessed by unauthorized users.

B. Similarly government facilities, universities and institutions must ensure that access to their computers over the Internet is strictly regulated.

C. These problems, however, can be solved through further development of computers.

D. So we should exclude computers from our business until these problems are solved.

3. Topic sentence: My mother is a kind and gentle woman.

A. She takes good care of her children.

B. She keeps her children all at school.

C. She gives us every comfort.

D. She saves every penny that she can and keeps everything in order.

4. Topic sentence: Urban people can enjoy a more comfortable life than rural ones.

A. Urban traffic is so well-developed that urbanites often visit exhibitions and parks.

B. Urban people can buy what they want at any time.

C. Life in the city is colorful and exciting.

D. But air in the city is not so clean as in the country.

5. Topic sentence: It is hard to travel to work by bus during the rush hour.

A. You have to wait in long lines at the bus stop.

B. When the bus arrives, someone always tries to push past you to get in first.

C. After you pay your fare, you are shoved down the aisle by the rest of the boarding passengers.

D. Sometimes you can read the morning newspaper during the ride.

E. A passenger standing next to you might shove his or her elbow in your ribs, step on your toes, or even drop cigarette ashes on you.

F. It certainly is a relief when you finally reach your stop.

III. Read the following paragraphs carefully and write a suitable topic sentence or concluding sentence.

1. Nowadays telephone has become an indispensable part of our life. We say "Hello" to our friends and relatives living far away over the phone. We make phone calls to ask for help and information from social services. And we purchase fast food, vegetables and even family appliances through phone calls. For businessmen telephone is the most important tool to conduct business activities. What telephone brings us is efficiency and convenience.

Topic sentence: _____

Concluding sentence: _____

2. Dinner that evening was not a success. Agnes Resker refused to eat anything, while Mavis Pellington ate her meal in silence. Everyone was waiting for Tobermory. A plate of poisoned fish stood ready for him in the dining room, but he did not come home. Nobody talked much, and nobody laughed. It was a most uncomfortable meal.

Topic sentence: _____

Concluding sentence: _____

3. Computers are playing a more and more important role in modern society. They are widely used in the fields of business, industry, and transportation. They also work wonders in medical work, space travel as well as in scientific research, bringing about fantastic things in science and technology. Computers are also entering ordinary families. Today ordinary people use them to obtain valuable information, professors use them to put unrelated facts in order, and children use them to play games. There seems to be no limit to the work that computers can do.

Topic sentence: _____

Concluding sentence: _____

4. Travel is a very good means of broadening a person's perspective. It makes you come into contact with different cultures, meet people of different colours and races, eat food of special flavours, and go through peculiar rites and ceremonies. By traveling a lot, you will not only enrich your knowledge and experience, but also be aware of the vastness of nature.

Topic sentence: _____

5. Firstborn children and only children tend to be leaders. Researchers have found that they dominate their younger brothers and sisters, have more self-esteem, and appear to be more adult-oriented. Twenty-one of the original twenty-three astronauts were either firstborn or only children. Children who are born in the middle tend to be passive. They are the average students and are often dominated by both older and younger siblings. Last-born children have the highest intelligence quotients. They are more verbal and tend to be more popular with their peers than are their older brothers and sisters.

Topic sentence: _____



Keys to Simulating Operations

I . 1. universal

2. differences between high school life and college life
3. a very important role in the modernization of our country
4. the conveniences of living alone in a rented room
5. the students' intimate friend after class

II . 1. C 2. D 3. D 4. D 5. D

III . 1. Nowadays telephone has become an indispensable part of our life.

What telephone brings us is efficiency and convenience.

2. Dinner that evening was not a success.

It was a most uncomfortable meal.

3. Computers are playing a more and more important role in modern society.

There seems to be no limit to the work that computers can do.

4. Travel is a very good means of broadening a person's perspective.

5. The character of a child seems to vary due to the sequence of birth.