

# Writing Center

## Paragraph Writing Guidelines

A paragraph is a group of sentences that relate to one central idea. To write a single-paragraph composition, follow these guidelines.

1. Develop a *topic sentence* that identifies clearly the *topic* and the *main idea* (usually an opinion or comment about the topic). Your sentence should usually be the first or second sentence of your paragraph.
2. Plan your paragraph by writing down all the examples, details, and reasons you can think of that relate to your topic sentence. At this planning stage, complete sentences are not necessary. Do not stop to question whether the ideas are good ones, do not stop to look up spellings—in your plan you should “let the ideas flow”
3. Evaluate your plan.
  - a. Check all your examples and details to ensure that each one clearly supports the topic sentence. If not, eliminate irrelevant details or rewrite them so that they do relate clearly to the topic sentence.
  - b. Add further examples and details if necessary. Remember that your paragraph will be convincing only if you have enough support for your topic sentence. The examples and details must be clear to readers and must be specific. Use names of people and places, particular cases, figure, and sense impressions to make your support clear and convincing.
  - c. Arrange the details in logical order (first to last), space order, order of importance (least to most), cause or effects in sequence, or another logical pattern. Effective paragraphs have purposeful organization of information.
4. Prepare a first draft in which you begin with your topic sentence and then follow the order of your plan to develop supporting sentences.
  - a. Your topic sentence serves as an introduction to let the reader know your subject and opinion.
  - b. Your supporting sentences present examples, details, and reasons that explain, clarify, and illustrate the point you mentioned in your topic sentence. Be sure to provide enough supporting examples.
  - c. Write a concluding sentence that repeats the idea given in your topic sentence, but use different wording if possible.
5. Evaluate and revise your first draft.
  - a. Be sure that your topic sentence clearly states your topic and your opinion.
  - b. Double check each supporting sentence.
    1. Make sure you have enough examples and that the examples are specific.
    2. Be sure each supporting sentence is complete and is clearly expressed.
    3. Be sure readers understand how each supporting sentence is connected in meaning to the topic sentence.
  - c. Review your organization to ensure that supporting sentences are arranged in a logical order.
  - d. Provide transitions between sentences to improve the connections; for instance, use “for example” to introduce an example, “however” to signal a contrast, and “therefore” to signal a result.
  - e. Rewrite your draft to reflect any changes you have made. Do not hesitate to write several drafts in order to improve the expression of your ideas.
  - f. Correct all punctuations, spelling, and grammar before you write the final version.
6. Prepare the final paper in an acceptable format (ask your teacher for guidelines). Final papers should be neat and should be either written in ink or typed on one side of the paper. Final papers should have one-inch margins and page numbers if they are more than one page long. Proofread your final paper, making corrections neatly.

## Examples

Winter is my favorite season. When the weather turns cold, I enjoy taking long walks without worrying about becoming too hot and tired to continue. In addition, I feel more relaxed in winter than in summer because I can build a fire in my fireplace, prepare a cup of hot chocolate, and curl up on my recliner with the latest issue of *Southern Living*. I especially like the time away from summer chores such as cutting grass, weeding the gardens, and washing the car. All in all, I prefer the cold season.

My brother Bart is cruel. For example, Bart makes fun of the neighborhood children by calling them names like “Shorty” and “Fatty”. In addition, Bart sometimes hides the bat when the neighbors are planning to play softball. Bart is especially mean to animals, for instance, he once chased my kitten up a tree. Another time, Bart kicked the dog when she brushed against his leg. My brother’s behavior toward children and animals is barbarous.

Having driven a Volkswagen Rabbit and a Ford Escort, both of which are small, moderately priced cars. I prefer the Rabbit. The Rabbit’s seats are well padded and comfortable so that riders do not feel cramped, whereas the Escort seats are hard, making the rider feel restless after thirty minutes. In addition, the Rabbit comes with excellent acoustical protection, making the car quiet even on bumpy roads, the Escort, on the other hand, sounds like a lawn mower even on smooth roads in calm weather. Parking and turning in tight places such as such as a shopping center lots are easy with the Rabbit, even without power steering, however, the Escort’s larger steering radius makes U-turns and some parallel parking problems frustrating. Financial matters are the deciding factor for the most car purchases. In this area, the Rabbit is a better buy, costing almost six hundred dollars less than a comparably equipped Escort. In addition, the Rabbit requires fewer and less expensive repairs than the Escort, which will cost most people about two hundred dollars a year more in upkeep than the Rabbit will cost. Finally, the Rabbit’s gas mileage is thirty-five miles per hour in contrast with the Escort’s twenty-six miles per hour. Considering all of these factors—comfort, ease of use, and cost—the Rabbit is my choice.

## Example of Paragraph with Subtopic Sentences

Even though seven-year-old children can be cute and inquisitive as they begin to show their independence, my brother, Jimmy, has developed a mean streak that makes him unpleasant company for all of us. For example, Jimmy is cruel to animals. He often kicks the dog, Sally, if she brushes against his legs while he is watching television or if she barks at noises outside. One Jimmy chased a neighbor’s cat up a tree and left the cat there while the owners searched everywhere for it. Jimmy is also unkind to children in our neighborhood. When the children are playing kickball in the street, Jimmy grabs the ball and runs away with it so that they must stop the game and chase him. Even worse is his tendency to tease younger children, calling them stupid when they ask typical childish questions like “why is the sky blue?” or “Why do cats have tails?” Last week Jimmy maliciously poured water under Billy Green’s swing set so that Billy had to get his new shoes muddy in order to use his swings. Even more distressing than his cruelty to animals and other children is Jimmy’s unkind treatment of our parents. For instance, Jimmy regularly disobeys them about bedtime by leaving his room several times each night, wandering around the house whining about dictatorships. He even embarrasses our parents in front of their friends, yelling “Close it yourself!” if they ask him to close a door or “Get it your self!” if they ask him to bring the newspaper from the other room. One evening my parents invited guests over after nine in the evening, hoping Jimmy would be asleep; however, my brother came out of his room four times asking for cookies. When my parents said no, Jimmy yelled, “You never give me enough to eat!” Jimmy is clearly so cruel that nobody likes to be around him.