# Organization

There are three types of sentences in a paragraph: topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences. An effective topic sentence is a complete sentence that clearly states the main idea. Supporting sentences give the reader more information about the topic sentence. The last sentence in a paragraph is the concluding sentence.

## **Paragraph Organization**

There are usually three types of sentences in a paragraph:

* topic sentences
* supporting sentences
* concluding sentences

### **Topic Sentences**

Each paragraph usually has only one topic sentence. A topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a paragraph. It states the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence has two parts: a **topic** and a **controlling idea**. The topic is the subject of the paragraph, or what the paragraph is about. The controlling idea controls, or limits, the amount of information you write about the topic in the paragraph. The topic sentence, with the topic and controlling idea, tells your reader what to expect when they read the rest of the paragraph.

### An effective topic sentence…

* is a complete sentence
* is usually at the beginning of a paragraph
* does not announce the topic (e.g., I’m going to talk about studying at the ELC in this paragraph.)
* should not be too general (e.g., The ELC is nice.)
* should not be too specific (e.g., Studying at the ELC costs people who study full-time a lot of money every semester and even more if they are not residents.)

Here is an example of an effective topic sentence:

The English Language Center is a great place for international students to learn English.

The ELC is the **topic** of the paragraph. There are many things you can say about this topic: the ELC’s location, the building and classrooms, the cost, the curriculum, the teachers, the students, the resources, etc.

However, if you try to tell your reader everything about the ELC, there will be too much information for just one paragraph—you could probably write an entire book! So you add a **controlling idea**: ...is a great place for international students to learn English. This controlling idea limits and focuses the paragraph. You’re not going to write about everything about the ELC. You’re only going to explain why the ELC is a great place for international students to learn English.

With a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea, your main idea is clear to your reader. Now, it’s time to explain your main idea.

### Supporting Sentences

A main idea is the most important idea in a paragraph, but it’s not the only idea! After reading your topic sentence, your reader expects you to explain and support the main idea. The sentences that do this are called **supporting sentences**.

There are many types of supporting sentences. Supporting sentences can give examples, explanations, details, descriptions, facts, reasons, and more. You can use different kinds of supporting sentences in the same paragraph.

Consider the topic sentence from before: The ELC is a great place for international students to learn English. The reader’s first thought after reading this sentence is probably, “Okay, why?” You need supporting sentences to help your reader understand what you said in your topic sentence.

Here are some examples of supporting sentences for the topic sentence above:

* **Explain:**The focus of the ELC is to help each student progress in their language-learning goals. (Explains why the ELC is a great place to learn English.)
* **Describe:**The ELC has level-specific goals for each class that give focus and purpose to every lesson. (Describes a part of the curriculum for the school that makes it a great place to learn English.)
* **Give reasons:**The ELC supports and motivates its students within the classroom as well as outside of it. (Gives a reason for why the ELC is a great place to learn English.)
* **Give facts:**There are many activities offered to students for extra English practice. (Gives a fact about the school that shows the ELC is a great place to learn English.)
* **Give examples:**Some of the important resources ELC students have include excellent teachers, a computer lab, and a large library of English books. (Gives examples of the resources that make the ELC a great place to learn English.)

A paragraph usually has between three and ten supporting sentences, depending on how long they are. A good goal is to write at least 4-6 supporting sentences for a paragraph. Remember, you can use different kinds of supporting sentences in the same paragraph. However, you might not want or need to use every kind of supporting sentence in a paragraph.

### Concluding Sentences

Each paragraph usually has only one concluding sentence. It is almost always the last sentence in a paragraph. Your concluding sentence should end your paragraph logically.

Concluding sentences can remind the reader of the main idea, state an opinion, make a prediction, give advice, etc. You should notgive the reader any new information about the topicin the concluding sentence.

Again, consider the example topic sentence from before: The ELC is a great place for international students to learn English.

Here are some examples of different concluding sentences for the topic sentence above:

* **Restate the main idea:**There is a wonderful environment for learning English at the ELC.
* **State an opinion:**The ELC is the best school for studying English.
* **Make a prediction:**If you study at the ELC, your English will definitely improve.
* **Give advice:**You should come to the ELC to learn English, too!

## Exercises

### Exercise 1: Identify the topic and the controlling idea

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

1. The most important holiday for families in Mexico is Christmas.
2. Playing sports is one of the most popular hobbies for college students.
3. The most memorable day of my life was the day I graduated from high school.
4. Learning English requires patience and practice.
5. Pizza is the most traditional dish in Chicago.

### Exercise 2: Identify an effective topic sentence

In each group of sentences, there is one sentence that is a more effective topic sentence. Read each of the sentences and choose the sentence that would be the best topic sentence.

1. **Topic:** Niagara Falls
   1. Niagara Falls is a really big waterfall.
   2. I will describe Niagara Falls, the largest waterfall.
   3. Have you seen Niagara Falls? It is amazing to visit.
   4. Niagara Falls is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the United States.
2. **Topic:** Dances
   1. Bachata is a very popular type of dance in South America.
   2. I want to talk about how Hip hop dancing is fun.
   3. Irish clogging requires special shoes with metal pieces to create loud sounds on the stage.
   4. Dancing all over the world.
3. **Topic:** Restaurants
   1. Do you think restaurants have delicious food? I do.
   2. 85% of people in the world like to eat at restaurants, especially when it has authentic food from their country such as real Mexican tamales or Chinese noodles.
   3. Food trucks are becoming a more popular place for students to eat in Provo.
   4. I want to talk about why I like to eat at McDonald’s and Burger King.

Now look at the sentences you didn’t choose. Why are they not good topic sentences? Identify the problem(s) with them. How could you fix them so that they could be good topic sentences?

### Exercise 3: Write your own topic sentences

Read each paragraph. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Make sure your topic sentence includes a controlling idea.

**Paragraph A**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. First, a good teacher needs to be patient. There are many skills that take a long time to learn and students will make many mistakes during the learning process. Students will also have a lot of questions. A good teacher will be patient when the students make mistakes and ask questions because she knows that it takes time to learn new things. Another quality of a good teacher is that they are passionate. A good teacher is excited about teaching and can help the students be excited about learning. During a difficult learning process, students need a passionate teacher so they want to continue studying. Both of these qualities are important for a teacher to have.

**Paragraph B**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We can find courage in special situations like when we feel fear or danger or when we suffer or are tired. We need courage, for example, when there is a war or other bad things. Courage is when people risk their lives to help and save people in danger. When we have an accident or an illness, overcoming the physical or mental difficulties takes courage. It takes courage to find joy and hope in life. When we are tired, we need courage to continue, such as when an athlete continues to the finish line in a marathon. Abbe Pierre said, “The biggest failure is not having the courage to dare.” I agree with this. In our lives, we need to have courage in difficult things.

**Paragraph C**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. First, many people turn to YouTube when they want to know how to do something new. For example, many people have learned how to play musical instruments, how to fix a car, how to apply makeup, or even cook a new dish. This educational use of YouTube can be very fun and worthwhile. Another reason people watch YouTube videos is to be entertained. There are many YouTube channels that specialize in telling stories, making music, or showcasing unique talents. These entertaining YouTube videos are shared with friends or posted to social media because they are funny or interesting. These are just two of the many reasons why people like to spend time on YouTube.

### Exercise 4: Identify supporting sentences

For each topic sentence, read the supporting sentences and identify which supporting sentences support the controlling idea. Multiple correct answers may be possible.

1. TS: A shared room has many advantages.
   1. Shared rooms are less expensive than private rooms.
   2. It is easier to clean the apartment since there are multiple people.
   3. Buying a house is very expensive.
   4. Sharing a room can be difficult.
   5. Also, having a roommate gives you a chance to talk about your day.
2. TS: Modern cell phones have many convenient applications.
   1. My sister is addicted to a game on her phone.
   2. I like to watch documentaries because I can learn about new things.
   3. For example, you can learn a language using an app.
   4. App designers try to encourage users to use their cellphones frequently.
   5. Almost all Americans have a smartphone, young and old.
3. TS: Reading a book is a great way to learn new vocabulary.
   1. Writing vocabulary down will help you keep a journal of the words that you are learning.
   2. When you read, keep a notebook nearby to write down unknown words.
   3. To increase your reading comprehension you should start with books that have only about 5 new words per page.
   4. Many books also have been made into movies.
   5. As you read new genres, you are introduced to more context-specific words

### Exercise 5: Identify supporting and topic sentences

Read each sentence. Identify it as a topic sentence (TS) or supporting sentence (SS).

\_\_\_\_\_   1. For example, by using the panoramic feature, the photographer can generate a wider perspective in the photo.

\_\_\_\_\_   2. An ideal student participates.

\_\_\_\_\_   3. Running, for instance, is a great way to burn calories.

\_\_\_\_\_   4. Eating fruits and vegetables increases the amount of natural vitamins and minerals you have in your body.

\_\_\_\_\_   5. Participation helps students to connect their learning environment 100% of the time.

\_\_\_\_\_   6. There are many interesting features to a digital camera.

\_\_\_\_\_   7. When a student goes to an activity, they participate in activities and help as needed.

\_\_\_\_\_   8. Our bodies are made up of at least 60% water.

\_\_\_\_\_   9. Being able to view a picture before printing it helps photographers to edit and add additional artistic features to the photo.

\_\_\_\_\_   10. The human body needs two important things to stay healthy.

### Exercise 6: Write supporting sentences

Read each topic sentence. Write 3-5 supporting sentences that support the topic sentence.

1. There are a few simple steps to renting an apartment in Provo.

2. Making healthy food choices is important and easy.

3. Homework is an essential tool for learning new material well.

### Exercise 7: Identify concluding sentences

Choose the best concluding sentence to complete the paragraph.

1. Nowadays, the majority of us choose to shop online because it has simple steps. First, we should search the websites of the stores where we want to buy things. Sometimes these stores give us the option to register and receive emails with promotions or discounts. Next, when we are sure that we want to buy something, we should click on the "add to cart" button. This creates a list of the things that we are going to buy. Last, when we have found everything that we are looking for, we should pay. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   1. We should check the payment method because sometimes stores only allow certain kinds of payment.
   2. For example, you can easily buy groceries online and have them delivered to your home.
   3. By following these steps, you will have a good experience buying online.
2. Traveling to another country often requires one of many different types of visas. Student visas are required to study in another country, and they are valid for a short amount of time. Work visas are necessary for people who want to find a job in another country. Travel visas are important for tourists who will spend time outside of their home country for vacation or leisure. People who qualify for medical treatment in a foreign country often need to obtain a medical treatment visa before they are able to travel for the treatment. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   1. Many different types of visas are available for people traveling to another country.
   2. Some people can obtain visas if they will marry someone in another country.
   3. I like to travel to other countries.
3. Trains are a popular way to get around in some countries. Many places like Japan, Spain, and Saudi Arabia have excellent rail systems for public transportation. These systems are popular for several reasons. For example, they are more convenient than owning and maintaining a personal vehicle. Also, they are less expensive than other forms of transportation, like paying for a taxi. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Subways are also a popular way to get around the city in many modern cities.
5. Finally, trains are ideal for long-distance trips.
6. The next time you need to get around in one of these places, consider taking the train.

### Exercise 8: Write concluding sentences

Read each paragraph. Write a concluding sentence for each paragraph.

1. The most difficult thing to learn about English is the grammar. One difficult thing about grammar is remembering the “s” ending in the third person present when the subject is she, he, or it. I often forget to use this when I write sentences or questions. Even though I understand the rule and how to use it, I forget it. Another difficult thing about English grammar is the prepositions. Although I know their meaning, I never use them correctly in a sentence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Vegetables with rice is a healthy and convenient meal.  First, vegetables have important nutrients that our bodies need. Vegetables provide fiber and vitamins to the body. They are also low in fat. If we eat them often, they can help us stay healthy. Next, the meal, vegetables and rice, is easy to cook. To cook the vegetables, you only need to boil water and add a little bit of oil and spices. After you cook the vegetables, you can quickly cook the rice.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. People come from all over the world to visit the famous Iguazu Falls. These enormous waterfalls are famous as one of the natural wonders of the world located in South America. Tourists don’t just visit the falls because they are famous for their size. Tourists also enjoy visiting the falls because the surrounding nature is amazing. There are interesting plants \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise 9: Identify topic, supporting, and concluding sentences

Read each sentence. Identify whether the sentence is a topic sentence (TS), supporting sentence (SS), or concluding sentence (CS).

\_\_\_\_\_   1. Being able to recognize musical notes is very important to know how long to hold a note in a tune.

\_\_\_\_\_   2. Learning to play a musical instrument requires certain skills.

\_\_\_\_\_   3. If your fingers are flexible, you can reach further on the instrument.

\_\_\_\_\_   4. When you play the piano, you need to be able to play multiple keys at the same time.

\_\_\_\_\_   5. Therefore, if someone acquires these skills, they will be able to be a musician.

\_\_\_\_\_   6. Stained glass windows in cathedrals showed important religious pictures by making larger objects with smaller shapes of glass.

\_\_\_\_\_   7. The windows were different than paintings or sculptures on display in the cathedral; they were part of the building itself.

\_\_\_\_\_   8. As a result, European cathedrals will amaze tourists with beautiful stained glass windows.

\_\_\_\_\_   9. Stained glass windows are the most artistic part of ancient cathedrals in Europe.

\_\_\_\_\_   10. The windows had many beautiful colors that lit up when the sun shone through them.

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