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**Lesson: The paragraph**

A paragraph is the essential unit of thought in writing. It is a group of sentences that all relate to a single topic. Paragraphs can include many different kinds of information and serve different purposes; for example, some paragraphs describe people or places, other paragraphs explain how to do or to make something, narrate a series of events, compare or contrast two things, or describe causes and effects.

Although it may consist of a single sentence, it is usually a group of sentences that develop one main point or controlling idea. The form of a paragraph is distinctive: the first line is indented.

Certain conventions or rules govern the construction of a paragraph. The reader expects a paragraph to be **coherent** (organized/ideas flow smoothly using transitional words and phrases), **developed** (with its sentences well explaining or qualifying the main point) and **unified** (with all its sentences relevant to the main point/topic). The paragraph has 3 main parts: the topic sentence, the supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence.

1. **The Topic Sentence**: It is usually the first sentence of the paragraph and states its main idea. It is not really detailed, but introduces an overall idea that will be discussed later in the paragraph.

For example, suppose that you want to write a paragraph about the natural landmarks of your hometown.  The first part of your paragraph might look like this:

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| **My hometown, Wheaton, is famous for several amazing natural features**.  First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep. |

→ Note how the first sentence, *My hometown, Wheaton, is famous for several amazing geographical features is* the **most general** statement. This sentence is different from the two sentences that follow it, since the second and third sentences mention specific details about the town's geography, and are not general statements.

The paragraph does not only name **the topic/ the subject** but it limits it to one or two areas that can be developed completely in the space of one §. The specific area is called **the controlling idea.**

**Practice:** Find *the subject* and *the controlling idea* of the following topic sentences :

* ***New York has a fascinating mixture of European and Asiatic traditions.***

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* To be an effective teacher requires certain characteristics.

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* Having a first child is difficult because of the significant adjustments in your life.

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The subject and controlling idea of a paragraph must not be too general or too specific. It must be limited enough to be discussed in a single §.

**e.g**: - France is an interesting country. → **too general (**there is too much to say about this topic)

→ **revised**: France has some spectacular mountains.

* Pollution is dangerous. → **too general**

→ **revised:** The effects of pollution results in human diseases.

1. **Supporting Sentences :** They come after the topic sentence and develop it, i.e., they explain the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples, facts, statistics or quotations.

As you consider again the above-mentioned short paragraph*,* a **question** like "What are the natural features that make Wheaton famous?"  should appear in your mind. The reader should then expect that the rest of the paragraph will give an answer to this question.

We can see that **the second** **sentence** in the paragraph gives some explanation for the fact that Wheaton is a famous town and similarly with **the third and fourth** **sentences** also. They are called **supporting sentences** because they "support," or explain, the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

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| My hometown is famous for several amazing natural features.  **First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep. The third amazing feature is the Big Old Tree. This tree stands two hundred feet tall and is probably about six hundred years old.** |

Whenever possible, you should include enough details in your paragraph to help your reader understand exactly what you are writing about.  In the above paragraph, three natural landmarks are mentioned, but we do not know very much about them.  For example, we could add a sentence or two about Wheaton river concerning HOW wide it is or WHY it is beautiful.  Consider this revision:

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| --- |
| My hometown is famous for several amazing natural features.  First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. **On either side of this river, which is 175 feet wide, are many willow trees which have long branches that can move gracefully in the wind.  In autumn the leaves of these trees fall and cover the riverbanks like golden snow.**Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep.  **Even though it is steep, climbing this hill is not dangerous, because there are some firm rocks along the sides that can be used as stairs.  There are no trees around this hill, so it stands clearly against the sky and can be seen from many miles away.** The third amazing feature is the Big Old Tree. This tree stands two hundred feet tall and is probably about six hundred years old.  These three landmarks are truly amazing and make my hometown a famous place. |

1. **The Concluding Sentence :** it is the last sentence of the §. It signals its end and gives the reader important points to remember. It restates the main idea of the § using different words. In the above §, the last sentence: These three landmarks are truly amazing and make my hometown a famous place is the concluding sentence.

The concluding sentence is the last sentence of the paragraph. It concludes, or wraps up, a paragraph. It lets the reader know that you have finished talking about the idea introduced by the topic sentence. A concluding sentence often has one of these four important purposes:

1. It restates the main idea. 3. It gives an opinion.

2. It offers a suggestion. 4. It makes a prediction.

The following transitional words and phrases are commonly used at the beginning of a concluding sentence:

As a result, overall, for this reason, certainly, because of this, surely, in conclusion, therefore, for these reasons, clearly, thus, in brief.