

On the Job WRITING



BASIC EDITION

WRITING EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

Reggie Thomas works for a non-profit agency against drunk driving. He is one of many people in the organization trying to influence the public and legislators to pass a law against drunk driving.

Reggie sees his team struggling to develop a clear anti-drunk driving message. He asks the agency director if he may write a few paragraphs to explain the purpose and goal of the organization. She agrees and requests a copy of his document.

If Reggie is able to capture the heart of the message, he hopes the director will develop a more comprehensive report to send to state lawmakers. Each representative's vote will be important.

The director's goal when she passes the document on will be to persuade the legislature that it's time to change the drunk-driving law. Reggie knows he must express the main point in a way that catches the attention of lawmakers and entices them to keep reading.

Reggie has spent a lot of time thinking about what he should say. He has some ideas for sentences that he will connect to the main point.

He thinks, "Maybe I should say..."



Lesson 12

In this lesson, you will learn to:

- Write a paragraph's topic sentence
- Write supporting sentences

DEFINE IT!

Abstract Writing

Abstract writing refers to non-concrete, general or subtle language that does not describe the subject clearly.

PARAGRAPHS ARE BUILDING BLOCKS

Watch a house being built from the ground up, and you'll see the first floor going in, then the second floor, and perhaps a third floor. Multiple paragraphs work the same way—each paragraph is a building block to a longer document.

Paragraphs usually contain two to five sentences. In special cases, they may be as short as one sentence or as long as a half page. These are called supporting sentences and they explain the main idea. Paragraphs usually contain three parts:

- A main idea or point. This is often called the “topic” sentence.
- A few specific details that support the main idea.
- A summary sentence to recap the paragraph or transition into the next paragraph.



IDENTIFYING THE MAIN IDEA

The main idea, also called the topic sentence, explains the point of the paragraph. Often, it is the first sentence, but it can be at another place in the paragraph, even the end.

A paragraph is similar to a box for moving—one in which items are stored and labeled to identify the contents: “Joe’s bedroom,” “Amy’s bedroom,” “kitchen,” “family room” or other. Think of the box’s label as being similar to the main idea of a paragraph—it tells what is inside.

Coming up with a main idea is more difficult than slapping a label on a box, but by thinking about the point you want to make, you can identify the main idea. Once the main idea is clear, you will be able to write the sentence.

Imagine that you are an environmentalist writing a report about the threat to U.S. wetlands. Look at the examples below to identify good and poor topic sentences.

1. Too broad and abstract

Our nation's wetlands are in big trouble.

2. Too personal or opinionated

I am angry that wetland habitats are being destroyed.

3. Too complicated

Wetlands can be subdivided in three types, and each type is threatened by encroaching suburban development.

4. Suitable topic sentence

Industrial runoff is a major threat to U.S. wetlands.



Analyzing your own past writing, do you believe it tends to be (1) too broad and abstract, (2) too personal or opinionated, (3) too complicated or (4) suitable? Does this analysis suggest any changes you should make in your writing?

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

Supporting sentences, also called body sentences, provide details and other information that explain the main point of a paragraph. They can be made up of the following types of information or other evidence related to the main point.

- Facts
- Statistics
- Details
- Examples
- Illustrations
- Short story
- Quotes from experts
- Others

The type of body sentences you write depends on your subject.

Reggie in the opening story wrote the following paragraph that he will share with his director. His main idea is identified with an underline and supporting sentences are shown in parentheses ().

The legislature must pass new laws for stronger drunk-driving penalties. (Our current laws have been ineffective in reducing the number of alcoholics on our roads), and (the number of repeat offenders for drunk driving has increased 20%). The current law allows first-time drunk offenders to keep their driver's license, but (automatic suspension of an offender's driver's license would send an important message to these illegal drivers). (Tougher legislation must be enacted to create a deterrent to driving while intoxicated).



When writers fail to provide enough detail in their supporting sentences, the result may be an over-generalization that is untrue and unfair, for example, “*All engineering majors are analytical-minded.*”

Generalizations often result from the overuse of words such as “all” or “every.”

LESSON 12 ACTIVITY

For the two situations below, enter a TB for a main idea that is too broad, TP for too personal, TN for too narrow or TC for too complicated. Enter “Best” for the best main idea.

Book Reading

- The online version of books is something to consider.
- Electronic books are easier to access than library books.
- I would rather read an Ebook than a hard-back book.

Soccer

- Soccer deserves more coverage on television and announcers need to be better informed or the audience will pay no attention.
- Many of my friends play soccer.
- Soccer is called “football” in many countries.

Write two supporting sentences for the following main idea.

Completing an internship is a great way to gain work experience.