



Handout week 8 and 9: Paragraph structure

EXERCISE 1.

(1) 'Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. (2) First of all, gold has a **lustrous** beauty that is resistant to **corrosion**. (3) Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. (4) Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. (5) For example, a Macedonian coin remains as **untarnished** today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. (6) Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. (7) For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. (8) The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. (9) Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. (10) In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

Lustrous: glowing

Corrosion: chemical damage

Untarnished: unchanged in color

Writing technique questions:

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? Can you find a title?
2. What two main points does the writer make about the topic?
3. In which two sentences does the writer say that there are two main points?
4. What examples does the writer use to support each point?

TOPIC SENTENCES

PRACTICE 1. Remember that a topic sentence is a complete sentence and is neither too general nor too specific.

Step 1. Read the sentences in each group, and decide which sentence is the best topic sentence. Write BEST TS (for “best topic sentence”) on the line next to it.

Step 2. Decide what is wrong with the other sentences. They may be too general, or they may be too specific, or they may be incomplete sentences. Write *too general*, *too specific* or *incomplete* on the lines next to them.

Group 1

- _____ a. A lunar eclipse is an omen of a coming disaster.
- _____ b. Superstitions have been around forever.
- _____ c. People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon.
- _____ d. Is made of green cheese.

Group 2

- _____ a. The history of astronomy is interesting.
- _____ b. Ice age people recorded the appearance of new moons by making scratches in animal bones.
- _____ c. For example, Stonehenge in Britain, built 3500 years ago to track the movement of the sun.
- _____ d. Ancient people observed and recorded lunar and solar events in different ways.

Group 3

- _____ a. It is hard to know which foods are safe to eat nowadays.
- _____ b. In some large ocean fish, there are high levels of mercury.
- _____ c. Undercooked chicken and hamburger may carry E. Coli bacteria.

_____ d. Not to mention mad cow disease.

_____ e. Food safety is an important issue.

Group 4

_____ a. Hybrid automobiles more economical to operated than gasoline-powered cars.

_____ b. The new hybrid automobiles are very popular.

_____ c. Hybrid cars have good fuel economy because a computer under the hood decides to run the electric motor, the small gasoline engine, or the two together.

_____ d. The new hybrid automobiles are popular because of their fuel economy.

Group 5

_____ a. The North American Catawba Indians of the Southeast and the Tlingit of the Northwest both see the rainbow as a kind of bridge between heaven and earth.

_____ b. A rainbow seen from an airplane is a complete circle.

_____ c. Many cultures interpret rainbows in positive ways.

_____ d. Rainbows are beautiful.

_____ e. The belief that you can find a pot of gold at a rainbow's end.

Paragraph 1

_____ a. A notes/memo function lets you make quick notes to yourself.

_____ b. Other capabilities include word processing, spreadsheets, and e-mail.

_____ c. A voice recorder that uses a built-in microphone and speaker works like a tape recorder.

_____ d. Basic tools include a calendar to keep track of your appointments, an address and phone number book, to-do lists, and a calculator.

_____ e. MP3 playback lets you listen to digital music files, and a picture viewer lets you look at digital photos.

_____ f. Most personal digital assistants have tools for basic tasks as well as for multimedia functions.

_____ g. A few models also include a built-in digital camera and keyboard.

Paragraph 2

- _____ a. Twelve years after *Sputnik*, the United States caught up by becoming the first nation to land a man on the moon.
- _____ b. The Europeans have joined the competition, vowing to land European astronauts on the moon by 2025 and on Mars by 2035.
- _____ c. The number of nations competing in the “space race” has grown since the early days of space exploration.
- _____ d. China joined the competition in 2003 when it launched *Shenzou 5*.
- _____ e. Initially, the former Soviet Union took the lead when it sent the first man into Earth orbit in the spaceship *Sputnik* in 1957.
- _____ f. For almost 50 years, the United States and Russia were the only competitors in the contest to explore space using manned spacecraft.

Paragraph 3

- _____ a. Another important change was that people had the freedom to live and work wherever they wanted.
- _____ b. The earliest significant change was for farming families, who were no longer isolated.
- _____ c. The final major change brought by the automobile was the building of superhighways, suburbs, huge shopping centers, and theme parks such as Disney World in Florida.
- _____ d. The automobile revolutionized the way of life in the United States.
- _____ e. The automobile enabled them to drive to towns and cities comfortably and conveniently.
- _____ f. In fact, people could work in a busy metropolitan city and drive home to the quiet suburbs.

Paragraph 4

- _____ a. In time, this melted part rises as magma.
- _____ b. The formation of a volcanic eruption is a dramatic series of events.
- _____ c. As the plate sinks, friction and Earth’s heat cause part of it to melt.
- _____ d. The magma produces heat, steam, and pressure.
- _____ e. First of all, most volcanoes are formed where two plates collide.
- _____ f. When the heat, steam, and pressure from the magma finally reach the surface of Earth, a volcanic eruption occurs.

PRACTICE 2. Remember that a topic sentence is a complete sentence and is neither too general nor too specific.

Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following sentences.

1. Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.
2. Driving on freeways requires strong nerves.
3. Driving on freeways requires an aggressive attitude.
4. The Caribbean island of Trinidad attracts tourists because of its calypso music.
5. Spectacular beaches make Puerto Rico a tourist paradise.
6. Moving away from home can be a stressful experience for young people.
7. Many religious rules arose from the health needs of ancient times.
8. A major problem for many students is the high cost of tuition and books.
9. In my opinion, television commercials for cosmetics lie to women.
10. Owning an automobile is a necessity for me.
11. It is an expensive luxury to own an automobile in a large city.
12. Taste and appearance are both important in Japanese cuisine.

PRACTICE 3. Writing topic Sentences.

Write good topic sentences for the following paragraphs. Remember to include both a topic and a controlling idea.

1.

English speakers relaxing at home, for example, may put on kimonos, which is a Japanese word. English speakers who live in a warm climate may take an afternoon siesta on an outdoor patio without realizing that these are Spanish words. In their gardens, they may enjoy the fragrance of jasmine flowers, a word that came into English from Persian. They may even relax on a chaise while snacking on yogurt, words of French and Turkish origin, respectively. At night, they may shampoo their hair and put on pajamas, words from the Hindi language of India.

2.

In European universities, students are not required to attend classes. In fact, professors in Germany generally do not know the names of the students enrolled in their courses. In the United States, however, students are required to attend all classes and may be penalized if they do not. Furthermore, in the European system, students usually take just one comprehensive examination at the end of their entire four or five years of study. In the North American system, on the other hand, students usually have numerous quizzes, tests and homework assignments, and they almost always have to take a final examination in each course at the end of each semester.

3.

For example, the Eskimos, living in a treeless region of snow and ice, sometimes build temporary homes out of thick blocks of ice. People who live in deserts, on the other hand, use the most available materials, mud or clay, which provide good insulation from the heat. In Northern Europe, Russia, and other areas of the world where forests are plentiful, people usually construct their homes out of wood. In the island of the South Pacific, where there is an abundant supply of bamboo and palm, people use these tough fibrous plants to build their homes.

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

Step 1. Read paragraph A and B about red-light running. Notice the different specific supporting details that have been added to Paragraph B.

Step 2. Locate the topic sentence in Paragraph B. Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea.

Step 3. Which supporting sentences in Paragraph B contain the kinds of details listed below? Give the sentence numbers of each kind.

An example: _____

A statistic: _____

A quotation: _____

Paragraph A: Paragraph without Support

Red-Light Running

Although some people think that red-light running is a minor traffic violation that is no worse than jaywalking,¹ it can, in fact, become a deadly crime. Red-light runners cause accidents all the time. Sometimes people are seriously injured and even killed. It is especially a problem in rush hour traffic. Everyone is in a hurry to get home, so drivers run red lights everywhere. The police do not do much about it because they are too busy. The only time they pay attention is when there is an accident, and then it is too late. In conclusion, running a red light is a serious offense.

Paragraph B: Paragraph with Support

Red-Light Running

¹Although some people think red-light running is a minor traffic violation that is no worse than jaywalking, it can, in fact, become a deadly crime. ²Red-light runners cause hundreds of accidents, including deaths and injuries as well as millions of dollars in damages. ³Each year more than 900 people die, and nearly 200,000 are injured in crashes that involve red-light running. ⁴Motorists run red lights all the time. ⁵For example, in Fairfax, Virginia, a five-month-long survey at five busy intersections revealed that a motorist ran a red light every 20 minutes. ⁶Red-light runners are seldom caught. ⁷According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, "Communities don't have the resources to allow police to patrol intersections as often as would be needed to ticket all motorists who run red lights" ("Q&A").²

The next section shows you how to use examples as support. Other types of support—facts, statistics, and quotations—are explained in Chapter 3.

THE CONCLUDING SENTENCE

You may want to begin it with one of the signals:

- End-of-paragraph signals followed by a comma:

Finally,
In brief,
In conclusion, !!!! In conclusion and In summary are overused
Indeed,
In short,
Lastly,
Therefore
Thus,
To sum up

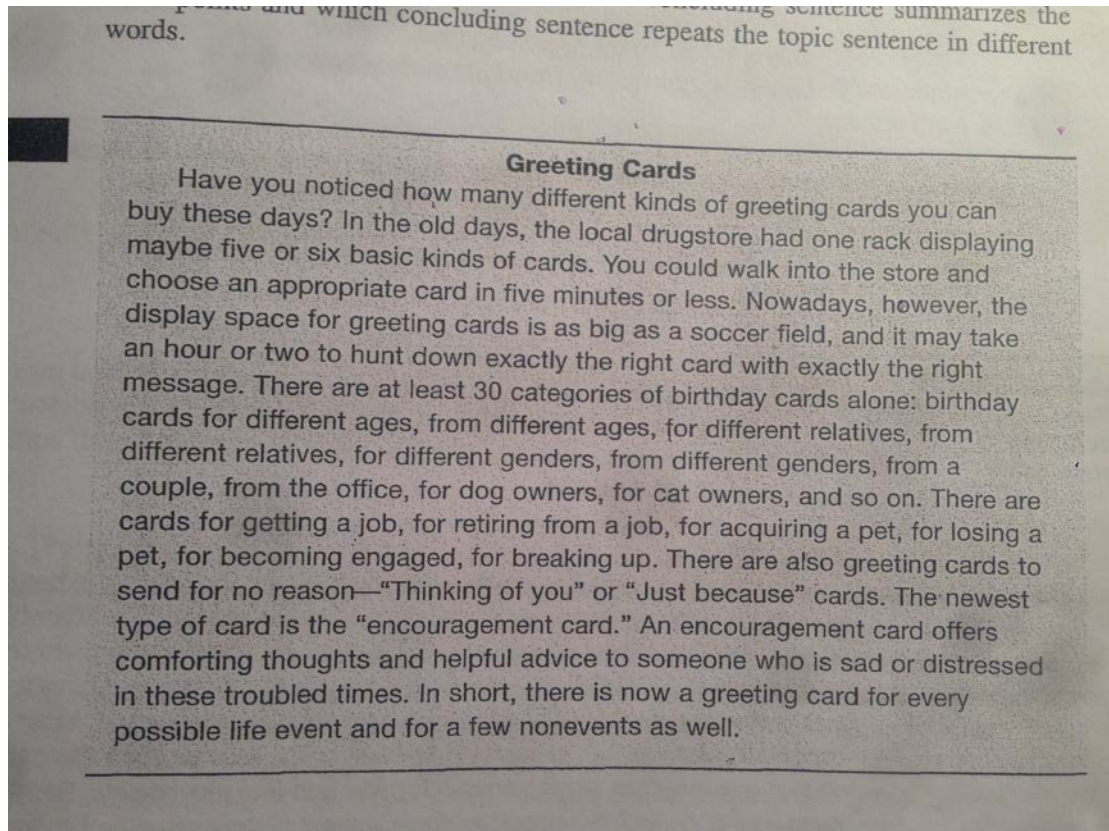
- End-of-paragraph signals not followed by a comma:

The evidence suggests that...
There can be no doubt that...
These examples show that...
We can see that...

Writing technique questions:

1. In which of the following paragraphs does the concluding sentence summarize the main points of the paragraph, which are not specifically stated in the topic sentence?
2. In which paragraph does the concluding sentence paraphrase the topic sentence?
3. Circle the conclusion signals in each paragraph.

A. Greeting cards



B. A Hawaiian Legend

A Hawaiian Legend

Native people create legends to explain unusual phenomena in their environment. A legend from the Hawaiian island of Kauai explains how the naupaka flower, a flower that grows on beaches there, got its unusual shape. The naupaka flower looks like half a small daisy—there are petals on one side only. The legend says that the marriage of two young lovers on the island was opposed by both sets of parents. The parents found the couple together on a beach one day, and to prevent them from being together, one of the families moved to the mountains, separating the young couple forever. As a result, the naupaka flower separated into two halves; one half moved to the mountains, and the other half stayed near the beach. This story is a good example of a legend invented by native people to interpret the world around them.

Writing Technique Questions

1. In which paragraph does the concluding sentence summarize the main points of the paragraph, which are not specifically stated in the topic sentence?
2. In which paragraph does the concluding sentence paraphrase (repeat in different words) the topic sentence?
3. Circle the conclusion signals in each paragraph.