A paragraph is a group of related sentences that discuss one (and usually only one) main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences. The number of sentences is unimportant; however, the paragraph should be long enough to develop the main idea clearly. A paragraph may stand by itself. In academic writing, you often write a paragraph to answer a test question such as the following: “Define management by objective, and give one example of it from the reading you have done for this class.” A paragraph may also be one part of a longer piece of writing such as an essay or a book. The following model contains all the elements of a good paragraph. Read it carefully two or three times. Then answer the questions that follow, which will help you analyse its structure.

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewellery, coins and ornamental purposes. Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remain as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty-three centuries ago. Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications. The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection outside spaceships. In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph?

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?

**The topic sentence**

All paragraphs have a topic sentence and supporting sentences, and some paragraphs also have a concluding sentence. The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. It not only names the topic of the paragraph, but it also limits the topic to one specific area that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph. A topic sentence is supposed to be complete and neither too general nor too specific.

**I. Read the sentences in each group, and decide which sentence is the best topic sentence. Then, 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. The first one has been done for you as an example.**

A. A lunar eclipse is an omen of a coming disaster. – too specific

B. Superstitions have been around forever. – too general

C. People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon. – Best

1.

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 3,500 years ago to track the movement of the sun.

D. Ancient people observed and recorded lunar and solar events in different ways.

2.

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. Food safety is an important issue.

3.

A. Hybrid cars are more economical to operate than gasoline-powered cars.

B. Hybrid cars 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. Hybrid cars are popular because of their fuel economy.

4.

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 aeroplane is a complete circle.

C. Many cultures interpret rainbows in positive ways.

D. Rainbows are beautiful.

**II. Write topic sentences for the following paragraphs.**

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

For example, 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 *pyjamas*, words from the Hindi language of India.

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In some 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 Poland, however, students are required to attend all classes and may be penalized if they do not. Furthermore, in the German system, students usually take just one comprehensive examination at the end of their entire four or five years of study. In Poland, 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 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 islands 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**

Supporting sentences explain or prove the topic sentence. One of the biggest problems in student writing is that student writers often fail to support their ideas adequately. They need to use specific details to be thorough and convincing. There are several kinds of specific supporting details: examples, statistics, and quotations.

Although we all possess the same physical organs for sensing the world – eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, noses for smelling, skin for feeling, and mouths for tasting – our perception of the world depends to a great extent on the language we speak, according to a famous hypothesis proposed by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. They hypothesized that language is like a pair of eyeglasses through which we “see” the world in a particular way. A classic example of the relationship between language and perception is the word *snow*. Eskimo languages have as many as 32 different words for snow. For instance, the Eskimos have different words for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed as hard as ice, slushy snow, wind-driven snow, and what we might call “cornmeal” snow. The ancient Aztec languages of Mexico, in contrast, used only one word to mean snow, cold, and ice. Thus, if the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is correct and we can perceive only things that we have words for, the Aztecs perceived snow, cold, and ice as one and the same phenomenon.

1. What is the main idea of this paragraph? Underline the part of the topic sentence that expresses the main idea.

2. What examples does the writer use to support this idea?

3. What words and phrases introduce the examples?

**The concluding sentence**

A concluding sentence serves two purposes:

1. It signals the end of the paragraph.

2. It leaves the reader with the most important ideas to remember. It can do this in two ways:

• By summarizing the main points of the paragraph OR

• By repeating the topic sentence in different words

A paragraph does not always need a concluding sentence. For single paragraphs, especially long ones, a concluding sentence is helpful to the reader because it is a reminder of the important points. However, a concluding sentence is not needed for every paragraph in a multi-paragraph essay.

End-of-paragraph signals:

The evidence suggests that ...

There can be no doubt that ...

These examples show that ...

We can see that ...

**III. Add a concluding sentence to these paragraphs:**

You can be a good conversationalist by being a good listener. When you are conversing with someone, pay close attention to the speaker's words while looking at his or her face. Show your interest by smiling and nodding. Furthermore, do not interrupt while someone is speaking; it is impolite to do so. If you have a good story, wait until the speaker is finished. Also, watch your body language; it can affect your communication whether you are the speaker or the listener. For instance, do not sit slumped in a chair or make nervous hand and foot movements. Be relaxed and bend your body slightly forward to show interest in the person and the conversation. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Modern communication technology is driving workers in the corporate world crazy. They feel buried under the large number of messages they receive daily. In addition to telephone calls, office workers receive dozens of e-mail and voice mail messages daily. In one company, in fact, managers receive an average of 100 messages a day. Because they do not have enough time to respond to these messages during office hours, it is common for them to do so in the evenings or on weekends at home. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**IV. Arrange the sentences in the correct order and combine them into a paragraph.**

1.

A. A notes/memo function let you make quick notes to yourself.

B. Other capabilities included word processing, spreadsheets, and e-mail.

C. A voice recorder that used a built-in microphone and speaker worked like a tape recorder.

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

E. MP3 playback let you listen to digital music files, and a picture viewer let you look at digital photos.

F. Most personal digital assistants (PDAs) had tools for basic tasks as well as for multimedia functions.

G. A few models also included a built-in digital camera and keyboard.

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 Shenzhou 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.

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.

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. Most volcanoes are formed where two plates collide.

F. Then one of the plates is forced under the other and sinks.

G. When the heat, steam, and pressure from the magma finally reach the surface of Earth, a volcanic eruption occurs.