

How to Organize a Paragraph..... a practical handout

What does a paragraph require?

- A paragraph requires a major idea that is relevant to the topic of an essay.
- A paragraph needs support or evidence for the major idea found in the essay.
- A paragraph also needs a concluding sentence.

The Topic Sentence

Not every paragraph will require a topic sentence. The kind of writing that will require a topic sentence is called **expository writing** (i.e. the kind of writing you would find in textbooks, which is different from creative writing or persuasive writing). Expository writing can include *presenting reasons, explanations, or steps in a process*. When writing an expository paper, the writer will need to start paragraphs with a sentence that will summarize the major idea of the overall paragraph.

For example:

Let's say we are writing an expository paper on Maine Coon cats. A topic sentence for a paragraph on common health issues of Maine Coon cats could be:

Maine Coon cats will often live a relatively long life; however, they are predisposed to health issues that can shorten their life.

Note that in this sentence, it is not too vague or specific. You are introducing the main idea instead of a specific detail that will be explained later in the paragraph.

Support or Evidence for the Idea

After the topic sentence, you will add supporting evidence from reliable sources (such as academic journals, books, government or academic websites, etc.)

For example:

Here's the supporting evidence that would follow the topic sentence:

The most pressing issue for Maine Coons are heart problems, also known as Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM).

Questions you can ask yourself include:

- Is there enough evidence here to support my main idea?
- Is my evidence specific enough to get my point across?

Explanation for your Support or Evidence

After you include evidence, you need to explain why you included that piece of evidence and how it relates to your topic sentence.

For example:

Here's the explanation that would follow the supporting evidence:

This genetic mutation can be fatal for the breed, which is why it is important for one to screen Maine Coons for HCM before they plan to breed them. Main Coon owners can check to see if their Maine Coon has HCM through the use of an echocardiogram, which can prevent future breeding for the mutation.

Conclude your Paragraph/ Transition the Idea in preparation for the Next Paragraph

After you explain your evidence, you have a few options:

- a. Add more evidence to support your topic sentence followed by an explanation.
- b. Conclude your paragraph with a sentence that reminds the reader of what they have read.
- c. Create a sentence that will act as a transition to the next paragraph.

*Think about the effect it will have on the reader, this is the last impression of the paragraph.

For example:

Here's a concluding sentence that would act as a transition:

- Maine Coon cats may be susceptible diseases; however, they are still a hearty breed that can live a hearty life.
 - (the next paragraph will delve into a description of the breed.)
- Here's a concluding sentence that would act as a reminder:
 - While our beloved cats may be susceptible to heart disease that could remain unnoticed, it is important that we remain aware of both the risks and the solutions we can provide for our cats and the future breeding of them.

References

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