

## Paragraph structure

A paragraph consists of a **topic sentence**, **supporting details**, specific examples, and a **concluding sentence**.

### The topic sentence:

- It is usually the first sentence in a formal academic paragraph.
- It is the most general statement in a paragraph.
- It introduces an idea that will be developed with details and made more specific with examples.

**EXAMPLE:** The college must improve its computer system.

**TIP:** A **topic sentence** causes the reader to ask questions that begin with wh- question words, such as what kind, how, and why.

In the example above, the reader might ask the following question: why is it a must for the college to improve its computer system?

### The supporting details:

- They are more specific than the topic sentence.
- They support/explain the topic sentence.
- They give an answer to the reader's question.
- A paragraph should have at least three supporting sentences.

**EXAMPLE:** 1- It is too old to serve students properly.

2- It malfunctions every now and then; this problem does not help the college maintain its programs.

3- It does not have the speed and capacity needed to offer new services.

Notice how the three supporting sentences above explain why the computer system must be improved.

### The specific examples:

- They support/explain the supporting details.
- They are the most specific sentences in a paragraph.

**EXAMPLE:**

1- This semester, four hundred students did not receive mid-term grades because of a computer break down.

2- The college e-mail system malfunctioned for two weeks, preventing students from electronically submitting research papers.

3- Students were told two years ago that online registration would save the college money and make it possible to sign up for courses from home. But this service has been postponed for another year because the computers cannot support it.

**The concluding sentence:**

- It summarizes the paragraph.
- It restates the topic sentence in a different way.

**EXAMPLE:** If the college is to attract students, maintain its programs, and offer new services, it must upgrade its computers.

The paragraph would look like this:

The college must improve its computer system. First, it is too old to serve students properly. This semester four hundred students did not receive mid-term grades because of a computer break down. In addition, it malfunctions every now and then; this problem does not help the college maintain its programs. The college e-mail system malfunctioned for two weeks, preventing students from electronically submitting research papers. Finally, it does not have the speed and capacity needed to offer new services. Students were told two years ago that online registration would save the college money and make it possible to sign up for courses from home. But this service has been postponed for another year because the computers can't support it. If the college is to attract students, maintain its programs, and offer new services, it must upgrade its computers.

**TIP #1:** Do not forget to indent the first line.

**TIP #2:** Make sure you use transitions, such as first, in addition, and finally to organize your ideas.