



The Paragraph – Syllabus

Course Description: This course will introduce your student to the world of writing paragraphs. Students will learn about topic sentences, supporting ideas, and concluding sentences. Students will then practice the use of transition words/phrases and super sentence skills to create super paragraphs! Finally, they will use all of these skills to learn about and write descriptive, how-to, expository, and narrative paragraphs.

Course Outline:

Week One: What Is A Paragraph?

Week Two: What's the Main Idea?

Week Three: The Topic Sentence

Week Four: Details

A. Supporting Details

B. Details That Don't Fit

Week Five: The Concluding Sentence

Week Six: Paragraph Stretch

A. Super Sentence Skills

B. Add Transitions

Week Seven: Types of Paragraphs I

Week Eight: Types of Paragraphs II

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Beginning Writer* grading rubric and will be averaged to receive a final course grade.



The Paragraph

Lesson Four: Details

SAMPLE LESSON

Once you have written a topic sentence, you can start adding **supporting details**. *Each supporting sentence gives more details about the topic.* Look at an example:

Topic sentence: “School is very important.” Why is school important?

- “I learn how to read books.”
- “I am taught how to do math.”
- “I learn how to write and use computers.”

These reasons are supporting details for your topic sentence.

Let us try another one: **“I would like to get a new pet.”** Imagine you told your parents this. They would want an explanation about why you wanted to get a new pet. Each of the following details supports your topic sentence.

- “I already have a cat and a dog.”
- “But, I think having a bird would be fun.”
- “I could even teach it to talk or do tricks.”

Let us try one more: **“I live in California.”** If you were trying to describe California to a friend who had never visited, what would you say?

- “California is a very large state.”
- “California has many big cities including San Francisco, San Diego, and Sacramento.”
- “It is usually warm all year, but there are some places near the mountains that get snow.”
- “California's left edge touches the beautiful Pacific Ocean.”

You may choose as many supporting details for your paragraph as you want. You can start with three or add ten. What is most important is that each detail you give supports the topic. Every sentence should help express a detail about the main idea.

If you have a topic sentence but cannot think of any supporting details, ask yourself questions again!

- Ask *why*: “Why do I think this?” “Why did I say this?” “Why do I want this?”
- Ask *what*: “What is it like?” “What are the steps?” “What describes this?”
- Ask *when* or *where* or *how*.

Assignment 4A: Add at least three supporting sentences to each topic sentence you wrote in Lesson 3. Make sure each sentence supports the topic and helps express the same main idea.

DETAILS WHICH DON'T FIT –

When we are adding supporting details to our paragraphs, we sometimes add **details that do not fit**. *Remember, all supporting details need to describe or explain the topic sentence and help express the main idea of the paragraph. Details that do not accomplish this do not belong in the paragraph.*

Sometimes, a poorly fitting detail is obvious. Look at some examples below. (We have underlined the topic sentences so the topic is very clear.)

School is important. I learn how to read books. I am taught how to do math. I learn how to write and use computers. I like peanut butter and jelly. I get to learn a lot of things in school, and this will help me in life.

Can you spot the detail that does not fit? The topic and main idea are that “school is important.” Three of the detail sentences support this topic. One detail sentence does not. “I like peanut butter and jelly” has nothing to do with school being important. This is a detail that does not fit.

Take a look at another example:

Ice cream is my favorite dessert. I love hard ice cream and soft ice cream. I love ice cream in a bowl or in a cone. The Cheesecake Factory sells many flavors of cheesecake. I love ice cream plain or topped with sprinkles. No matter what season, I will always choose ice cream for dessert.

Can you spot the detail that does not fit in this paragraph? Again, it is obvious. The topic and main idea are about the author's love for ice cream. What is the one sentence that does not have to do with ice cream? "The Cheesecake Factory sells many flavors of cheesecake." Sure, it might have to do with dessert, but it does not help express the main idea of ice cream being the author's favorite dessert.

Now, sometimes, the detail that does not fit is a bit trickier to find. Look at some other examples below. (Again, we have underlined the topic sentence.)

School is important. I learn how to read books. I am taught how to do math. I learn how to write and use computers. I am home-schooled. I get to learn a lot of things in school, and this will help me in life.

Can you spot the detail that does not fit in this paragraph? It is still pretty easy, but it is not as obvious. "I am home-schooled" does connect with the idea of *school*, so you might be tempted to think it is a good detail. However, it does not explain why "school is important." The main idea of this paragraph is not about *the author's* school, so the detail does not belong.

Ice cream is my favorite dessert. I love hard ice cream and soft ice cream. I love ice cream in a bowl or in a cone. Waffle cones can be messy. I love ice cream plain or topped with sprinkles. No matter what season, I will always choose ice cream for dessert.

How about this one? Remember, the main idea is that "Ice cream is my favorite dessert." What sentence is not about this? "Waffle cones can be messy." Yes, waffle cones do connect with the idea of ice cream, but the sentence "waffle cones can be messy" does not help express the idea that ice cream is the author's favorite dessert.

When we are adding supporting details to our paragraphs, we need to ask three questions:

1. Does the detail talk about the same topic as the topic sentence?
2. Does the detail explain or describe the topic sentence?
3. Does the detail help express the main idea of the paragraph?

If you cannot answer yes to all three of these questions, the detail does not fit and should not be included.

Assignment 4B: Read the paragraphs below. Underline the detail that does not belong in each one. Some will be very obvious. Others will be trickier. Ask the three questions above if you have trouble.

Paragraph 1:

Monopoly is a board game that my family enjoys. Each person begins with \$1500. When you roll, you move to certain spaces around the board and try to buy property. Then you can build houses and hotels on your properties. To win, you must be the last person with money. My family and I enjoy playing *Monopoly*. *Ticket To Ride* is another board game we like.

Paragraph 2:

To avoid stress when preparing for a vacation, it is important to have a plan. You should also have a plan to avoid the stress of buying a new car. Make a packing list a few days before. Finish all of the chores and cleaning around the house. Call the hotel and confirm the reservation. Keep a folder with all tickets and travel plans. With everything organized, preparing for a vacation does not have to be stressful.

Paragraph 3:

Sharpies are so much fun to use. Sharpies come in so many different colors. You can use them for art projects, packing, or even writing a note. You have to be careful, though, because Sharpies are filled with permanent ink. I got some ink on my white dress one time, but my mom got the stain out. Sharpies are a fun and practical writing tool.

Paragraph 4:

Tomorrow, we are having a birthday party for my sister Kelly. We have been planning this party for many weeks. We spent a lot of time planning for Christmas too. My mom has made the cake, and we have gathered all of the decorations. We will arrive early to set up for the party. Then, over fifty guests will come. I know Kelly will have a wonderful time.

Paragraph 5:

Fall is my favorite season. I love the cooling temperatures and the color-changing leaves. We always bake pumpkin bread in the fall. I love the flavors and smells of fall. I love fall activities like carving pumpkins, picking apples, and going to corn mazes. I just love fall!

Paragraph 6:

Have you ever played *Roller Coaster Tycoon*? It is a computer game that allows you to create your own amusement park. You have to reach certain goals, like having a certain number of rides in your park and a certain number of guests visiting. We went to an amusement park last year. It's fun to see what kind of roller coasters and park layouts you can come up with in *Roller Coaster Tycoon*.

Paragraph 7:

The color green is very relaxing. It reminds us of trees, well-watered grass, and nature. It can also be connected with the country of Ireland and the four-leaf clover, a symbol of good luck. Ireland contains many castles. Green is a beautiful color.

Paragraph 8:

Solving a Rubix Cube is very challenging. Chess is a challenging game to play. You have to follow a certain pattern of steps in order to get the colors to match up. I have done it correctly one time, but I had to follow very specific directions. Mastering a Rubix Cube is difficult but it is a very rewarding challenge.