

The Perfect Paragraph



Rules to Remember

Writing a Perfect Paragraph

General

- ☒ A paragraph is a series of sentences that are about one topic.
- ☒ A paragraph is made up of three parts: a topic sentence, supporting ideas, and a clincher.

Topic Sentences

- ☒ A topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph.
- ☒ The topic sentence answers one or more questions like why, how, or where?
- ☒ Every word in a topic sentence is important.
- ☒ You must be able to support your topic sentence.
- ☒ A topic sentence must be about something you can prove, explain, or show through description.

Outlines

- ☒ Outlines help organize ideas for paragraphs.
- ☒ An organized outline can look like this:

A. Topic Sentence

B. Supporting Ideas

1.

2.

3.

4.

C. Clincher

Supporting Ideas

- ☒ Details give writing flavor.
- ☒ Unrelated ideas do not explain or support the topic sentence.
- ☒ A transition is a link or a connection between sentences. (Examples: first, next, meanwhile, in conclusion)
- ☒ Vary the beginnings of sentences; use words that end in -ing, past tense verbs, or dependent clauses.

Clinchers

- ☒ A clincher summarizes the main ideas or feelings in a paragraph and lets the reader know when the paragraph is done.
- ☒ Clinchers don't just restate the topic sentence; restating the topic sentence as the clincher is too easy and usually dull.
- ☒ The clincher can be the same idea as the topic sentence, a question, an amusing thought, or an unexpected twist.
- ☒ The clincher cannot be another support sentence.
- ☒ A paragraph must come full circle from the topic sentence to the clincher.

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Organizing Paragraph Ideas

Practice Worksheet 1

Create outlines for the possible paragraphs below, based on the topic sentences. Remember that the outlining process is just the preliminary stage of the writing plan. You do not need to write complete sentences—just ideas. On the back of this worksheet, create your own outline with your own topic sentence; make sure it is clear and easy to support. Be creative!

Outline 1

A. Topic Sentence: This classroom is too noisy during tests.

B. Supporting Ideas

1.

2.

3.

4.

C. Clincher:

Outline 2

A. Topic Sentence: Barnaby Quip needs to hire more paragraph agents.

B. Supporting Ideas

1.

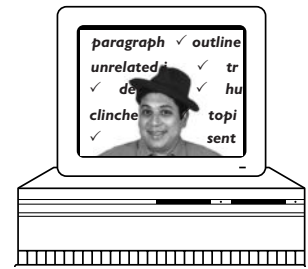
2.

3.

4.

C. Clincher:

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Recognizing Perfect Topic Sentences

Practice Worksheet 2

The following paragraph is missing a topic sentence. Below is a list of possible topic sentences for the paragraph. Write what's good or bad about the possible topic sentences below each example. Then, write the best topic sentence on the line above the paragraph.

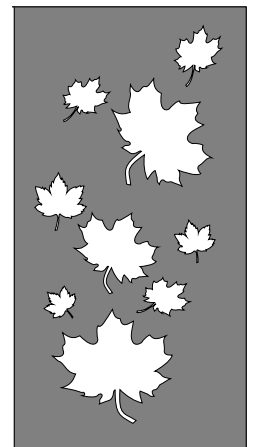
A topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph.

Topic sentence: _____

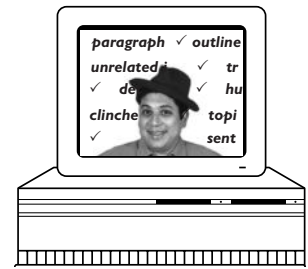
First of all, the patches of brick red and golden yellow leaves against a crystal-blue sky is a beautiful sight. Watching the leaves fall gracefully to the ground is also wonderful. I just love to jump into a five-foot high pile of freshly raked, crunchy leaves. To top it off, the crisp weather of an autumn day is perfect—not too hot and not too cold. To me, spring, summer, and winter just don't compare.

Topic sentences

1. What I like about fall.
2. Fall is my favorite season, I like it so much better than spring, summer, and winter.
3. Autumn leaves are beautiful.
4. I think fall is neat.
5. Fall is my best friend's favorite season.
6. Fall is my favorite season.
7. Spring is my favorite season.



name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Recognizing Unrelated Ideas

Practice Worksheet 3

Each outline below contains at least one unrelated idea. Read the sentences or ideas below the “Supporting Ideas” section of the outlines, and decide which ones do not support the topic sentence. Write the numbers of the unrelated ideas in the blanks on the right. These outlines are not complete; they do not contain clinchers.

A. Topic Sentence: My favorite food is pizza.

Unrelated ideas: _____

B. Supporting Ideas

1. I love the crunchy crust and the melted mozzarella cheese.
2. The best thing I like to drink with it is a giant glass of soda.
3. It's good either as a snack or as a main course.
4. My brother only likes pizza with anchovies and artichokes on it.

A. Topic Sentence: My most boring class is algebra.

Unrelated ideas: _____

B. Supporting Ideas

1. The work is too easy, and it doesn't challenge me.
2. All we ever do is work, work, and more work!
3. I never have a free minute to myself.
4. The teacher talks in a monotone that puts me to sleep.
5. The teacher tells the same jokes day after day.
6. Everything is in slow motion; attendance often takes up half the time.
7. The teacher always picks on me.

A. Topic Sentence: This classroom is a mess.

Unrelated ideas: _____

B. Supporting Ideas

1. In fact, the whole school is a mess!
2. dictionaries and papers on the floor
3. rows of desks out of order
4. writing on the desk tops
5. gum stuck on hall lockers
6. I keep my locker clean!

A. Topic Sentence: Bowling is the perfect sport.

Unrelated ideas: _____

B. Supporting Ideas

1. It develops coordination.
2. I always make it a point to be a member of a bowling team.
3. Bowling helps exercise a large number of muscles.
4. It provides a chance to interact with other team members.
5. It can be played indoors at any hour, during any type of weather.

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Unrelated Sentence Fun

Practice Worksheet 4

Below are four topic sentences and incomplete paragraph outlines. Using the "Sentence Bank," find the supporting sentences and clinchers that belong in each outline, and write the correct letters underneath the correct topic sentence. Also in the "Sentence Bank" are four unrelated sentences that do not belong in any of the paragraph outlines; write their letters at the bottom of this sheet. Keep in mind that the supporting sentences can be listed in any order. Each supporting sentence is worth 4 points (64 points possible); each unrelated sentence is worth 4 points (16 points possible); and each correct clincher is worth 5 points (20 points possible). (Total points possible is 100.)

A. Topic Sentence: My best friend is a great person.

B. Supporting Sentences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Clincher: _____

A. Topic Sentence: I really enjoy school.

B. Supporting Sentences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Clincher: _____

A. Topic Sentence: Reading is my favorite hobby.

B. Supporting Sentences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Clincher: _____

A. Topic Sentence: When I was little, I thought Halloween was the most frightening night of the year.

B. Supporting Sentences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Clincher: _____

Unrelated Sentences:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Unrelated Sentence Fun—Practice Worksheet 4

SENTENCE BANK

- a. I was sure the ghosts were out to get me.
- b. I can always count on her to be there when I need help.
- c. My teachers' lessons are always fun to listen to, informative, and stimulating.
- d. When I'm tired, I can relax with a good book.
- e. It's no wonder that I would always cringe whenever someone mentioned October 31st.
- f. When she talks to anyone, she always has something positive to say.
- g. Because there are so many books to read, I have my choice of hundreds of subjects.
- h. As you can tell, I am extremely lucky to have a best friend like her.
- i. I know ghosts don't exist, so I wasn't really afraid.
- j. Older kids dressed up in costumes and tried to frighten me.
- k. Most of my classes are interesting.
- l. Sometimes she gets mad and refuses to speak to me.
- m. I can forget my problems by reading a good book.
- n. I don't like some kinds of books at all.
- o. I was afraid to go outside because I thought I'd be eaten by a giant pumpkin.
- p. I like school so much that you'd think I'd want to go seven days a week!
- q. My idea of heaven is a quiet weekend with a book!
- r. I hate to go to school on Monday mornings.
- s. It's the only time I get to see some of my friends.
- t. Even if she's angry, she rarely loses her temper.

name _____

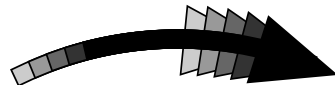


The Perfect Paragraph

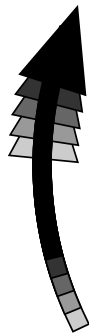
Composing Quality Clinchers

Practice Worksheet 6

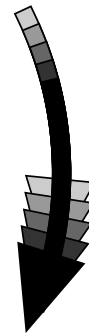
The following paragraph is missing a clincher. Write four different clinchers, according to the directions below. Circle the one that you think goes best with the rest of the paragraph. Remember that a paragraph must come full circle from the topic sentence to the clincher. Be creative!



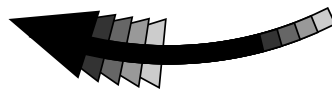
Topic Sentence



My sister is always trying to get out of cleaning up the house. Sometimes, she bribes my brother by offering him candy to clean her bedroom. Other times, she will try to “blackmail” me into mopping the kitchen floor. Yesterday, she swore that she’d tell Mom that I got in trouble at school if I didn’t start washing the floor. When she isn’t able to coerce any of us to do her chores, she pretends to be sick so that Mom will feel sorry for her. A sudden terrible headache usually gets her out of the dusting or mopping.



Clincher????



1. Use other words to restate the idea of the topic sentence.

2. Ask a question that refers to the topic sentence or the main idea of the paragraph.

3. End with an amusing thought. Make sure it refers to the main idea of the paragraph and doesn’t start a new idea.

4. Give the main idea an unexpected twist.

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Creating Colorful Sentences

Practice Worksheet 7

Sometimes, short “base” sentences, like the one in the example below, need to be expanded to make them more descriptive and meaningful. Keep in mind that details give writing flavor. Read the example below. Then, using the same “base” sentence, create several more colorful sentences on the lines below. Read your most colorful expanded sentence to the class.

Example: He ran.

This sentence is dull. To improve it, we need to add words that will help create a clear picture.

Possible sentences:

1. Thinking he could catch the next train, Emilio ran like the wind until he reached the station.
2. He never knew how slow he ran until he finished last in the 200-meter run at the track meet.
3. Because he was well-liked and qualified, he ran in the student election and won by a landslide.

Using the same “base” sentence, create three more expanded sentences.

He ran.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

In Other Words: Creating Colorful Sentences

Practice Worksheet 8

Try your skill at putting lifeless sentences into other words. Think about the questions that follow each sentence below, and add some of your own. Then, rewrite each sentence. You may add outside ideas and details to the sentences, but write only one sentence for each example.

1. The sky became dark.

How dark? What did the air feel like? What did it sound like? Were there clouds? Was a storm coming? Have you ever been outside when there was a sudden change in weather? What was it like? Why did the sky become dark? What are some other words for *dark*? (Use a thesaurus if you need help.) What is it like when the sky becomes dark in the winter?

Rewrite and expand the sentence without using the word *dark*. If possible, leave out the word *sky* as well.

2. My dog has spots.

What color and shape are the spots? What do the spots look like? What kind of dog? Where are the spots?

Rewrite and expand the sentence and describe the dog without using the words *spots* or *spotted*.

3. Fireworks exploded in the sky.

What did the explosion sound like? Have you ever heard anything explode? What was it, and what did it sound like—a tire blowing out or maybe dynamite exploding in a movie? What other words can you use to describe something that's exploding? What did the fireworks look like? Were they colorful?

Rewrite and expand the sentence without using the word *exploded* or naming any specific colors.

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Creating Colorful Paragraphs

Practice Worksheet 9

Read Paragraphs 1 and 2 below. Even though Paragraph 1 has the correct structure, it lacks flavor and detail. Notice that details and style are added to Paragraph 2. On the lines below, describe at least four changes that make Paragraph 2 better. Finally, rewrite Paragraph 3, adding your own details and style. Don't forget to vary your sentence beginnings and length and to add colorful descriptions.

Paragraph 1

My brother's room is always a mess. There are clothes on the floor. The bed isn't made. There is dust under the furniture. As you can see, my brother's room is really untidy.

Paragraph 2

My brother's room is always a mess. Piles of dirty clothes and old magazines cover the floor. Rarely is the bed ever made. Instead, the blankets hang draped over the side of the bed, ending in a heap on the floor. Under the furniture, masses of inch-thick dust mingle with stale cookie crumbs. It's no wonder my brother has given up and asked to move in with me!

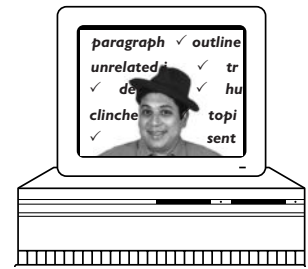
Changes that Improved Paragraph 1

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Paragraph 3

It's a wonderful day to be outside. The flowers are blooming. The sun is shining, and there isn't a cloud in sight. The birds are chirping. In conclusion, it's just gorgeous today!

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Combining Sentences: An Introduction

Practice Worksheet 10

Sometimes, a series of choppy, related sentences can be combined into a single, more concise sentence. Take a look at the set of sentences in the example below. Each set can be combined into a single sentence.

The Lazy Cat



Set 1

The cat lay curled.
The cat was gray.
It was in the sun.
It was on the table.

These sentences are choppy, and they all begin with *The cat* or *It*. They can be combined in a variety of ways into a more effective single sentence. For example:

The gray cat lay curled in the sun on the table.
The gray cat lay curled on the table, which was in the sun.

Try rewriting it yourself here, and then take a look at the second set of sentences.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Set 2

A paw stretched out.
It stretched slowly.
The paw was silver.
The paw reached toward the ceiling.

These sentences can be combined as well. Depending on how you want to begin your sentence, you might write one of these:

Slowly, a silver paw stretched out, reaching toward the ceiling.
A silver paw slowly stretched out and reached toward the ceiling.

Think of another way these sentences could be combined.

Challenge yourself with the two examples on Worksheet 11. Remember, there will be many possible combinations for one set of sentences.

The Perfect Paragraph



Combining Sentences

Practice Worksheet 11

In the two examples below, you will find several sets of sentences. Combine each set of sentences into one sentence, and write your combination(s) on the back of this worksheet or on a separate sheet of paper. There are many possible combinations for each set. As you combine the sentences, make sure you don't change their original meaning.

Example 1

Set 1

Robin stared in the mirror.
She stared at her reflection.

Set 2

She applied a coat of foundation.
It was another coat.
The foundation was liquid.
She applied it carefully.

Set 3

She squinted.
She stroked on the mascara.
The mascara was a special long-lash formula.

Set 4

The eye shadow was creamy.
The eye shadow was green.
She rubbed it on her eyelids.
She rubbed it gently.

Set 5

There remained only the touch of blush.
It was the last touch.
The blush was dark pink.

Set 6

Robin stared in the mirror again.
She stared for a long time.

Perhaps it was better than nothing.

Example 2

Set 1

Barnaby Quip looked through his monitor.
He looked intently.
He looked at Liz.
He held back a sneeze.

Set 2

Liz was helping someone.
She was helping Nick.
He needed help with his paragraph.
The paragraph was about the debating club.

Set 3

Barnaby listened.
He listened closely.
He couldn't believe his ears.

Set 4

Nick's paragraph contained fragments.
There were unrelated ideas in the paragraph.
The paragraph also had too many transitions.

Set 5

Liz told Barnaby she would help Nick.
She told him reassuringly.
She would help Nick rewrite the paragraph.
She would help him rewrite it so that it made sense.

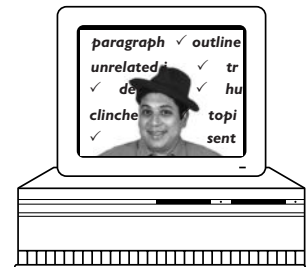
Set 6

Barnaby told Liz he had to go.
He told her gently.
Barnaby had to help others.
The others were in need of paragraph help.

He sneezed and exclaimed, "A linguaphile's work is never done!"



name



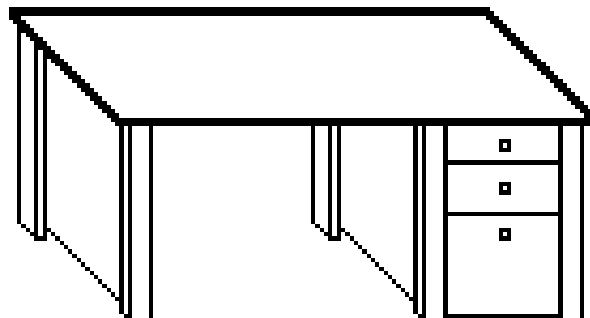
The Perfect Paragraph

Practicing Sentence Variety

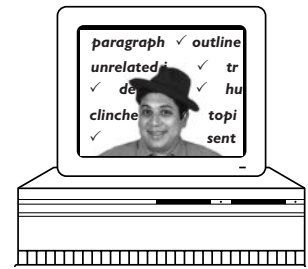
Practice Worksheet 12

Read the paragraph below. Then, rewrite it to make it sound better. You will need to add words, leave out repeated words, and change the order of others. Do not combine all sentences. Leave a few short for variety. Also, vary sentence beginnings.

He tore into the room. He tripped on a desk. The desk was out of place in the row. A girl dashed after him. She was angry. Her face showed the anger. The math class was dismayed. They looked up. They had been working on story problems. They had been working quietly. The boy turned unexpectedly. He stared straight at the girl. She stopped. The stop was short. No one dared to breathe.

[illegible]

name _____



The Perfect Paragraph

Using Transitions Effectively

Practice Worksheet 13

Transitions join, or glue, sentences together. Read Nick's paragraphs below (Example 1 and Example 2). Underline and then discuss his use of transitions in each one. You may want to review this segment of the video (21:00). Then, look at Example 3, a paragraph with no transitions. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite this paragraph using transitions to help you connect the ideas. In addition to using transitional words and phrases, you may want to rewrite or reword certain sentences to make the paragraph flow more naturally. Remember: Do not overuse transitions. Look at the Transitions box below for a list of possible transitions you can use.

Transitions

for example

next

first

second

on the other hand

after that

meanwhile

in conclusion

in general

however

indeed

in fact

Example 1—Nick's Paragraph with Too Many Transitions

Debating has always been an important part of my life. For example, when I was younger, I used to argue with everyone, even the mailman. As a matter of fact, I still argue with him! In general, I have always found it easy to talk my way in and out of situations. For example, I have won many debating contests. Therefore, I have no trouble getting up in front of large groups of people and debating for hours! Some people would get nervous. Debating about things that are important to me is what I enjoy because I feel very strongly about my opinions. If it hadn't been for the mailman, I might not have discovered debating.

Example 2—Nick's Corrected Paragraph

Debating has always been an important part of my life. For example, when I was younger, I used to argue with everyone, even the mailman. As a matter of fact, I still argue with him. Because I could talk my way out of every situation, even cleaning my room, my mother began entering me in debating contests. Since then, I have won many competitions. Besides having strong opinions about things, I just truly enjoy debating. Who knows, if I hadn't started arguing with the mailman, I might not have discovered my gift for debate.



Example 3—A Paragraph with No Transitions

Every child should have a pet. Children need the companionship that pets provide. Most pets require love and attention. Having pets helps children develop a strong sense of responsibility. Children learn a lot about life from their animals. Children really need pets. Pets need homes. Children and pets need each other.