

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. This means that 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?

- 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 doesn't 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.

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, which is critical to the distance learning department 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 can't 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 doesn't help the college maintain its programs. The college e-mail system, which is critical to the distance learning department 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.

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

TIP: Don't forget to **indent** the first line.