

Methods of Paragraph Organization

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how paragraphs are constructed based on different organizational methods. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Organizational Structures for Paragraphs

1a. Spatial

1b. Chronological

1c. Emphatic

1d. TEE

1. Organizational Structures for Paragraphs

Now that you know how paragraphs are made up of a topic sentence and supporting sentences, you can think about ways to organize these parts into an effective whole.

There are four different organizational structures:

- Spatial
- Chronological
- Emphatic
- TEE

Each of these is like a model for how you can build a paragraph, and each model can be used in a variety of situations. Once you master these four, you'll have plenty of options for any writing challenge.

1a. Spatial

The first model is the spatial organization method. **Spatial paragraphs** examine the details in a particular setting or of a particular person or object. That can include physical spaces or locations that may need description.

This is a really useful paragraph structure when your goal is to describe something specific to a location, such as the best sandwich shop in your hometown.

In my hometown, the best sandwich comes from Saul's Deli. When you walk into Saul's, you'll see a big deli case in front of you, filled with every kind of filling, side dish, and treat you could hope for. I always get a whitefish sandwich on rye, which means that I get to watch the cook slice the thick, brown loaf of bread, heap whitefish onto it, and slather the thing with brown mustard. Every sandwich comes with an amazing dill pickle that pops when you bite into it. With all this to offer, Saul's can't be beat for a good sandwich.

Notice how the topic sentence and concluding sentences are on either end, with the supporting sentences on the inside. Also notice that this paragraph is highly descriptive, full of adjectives and sensory details. It develops in a spatial manner, as if the author were walking the reader through this deli.



TERM TO KNOW

Spatial Paragraph

A paragraph that examines the details in a particular setting or of a particular person or object.

1b. Chronological

The second kind of paragraph we're going to practice is the **chronological paragraph**. Just as a spatial paragraph moves physically, chronological paragraphs move in time. They tell what happened in the order in which the events occurred.

This is a great tool for narrating a story, whether that's a story you've made up or a retelling of something that really happened.

When I first went to Saul's Deli, I only wanted to eat a bagel and cream cheese. As I got older, I began to experiment more with the kind of sandwich I would order. As a teenager, I started getting lox on my bagel, which I really liked. Then, one day, I went to the deli and saw someone eating a reuben, which looked delicious. So I asked for one myself. Once I took a bite, I knew I could love any kind of sandwich. Now, I try new things each time I go to Saul's.

Again, this retains the core paragraph structure of topic, supporting, and then concluding sentences. But here, you move through time with this author as she grows up.

Thus, the chronological method can tell the story of a short period of time (such as what happens in one day), a longer period of time (such as one's whole life), or even one event (such as telling someone the plot of a movie from when it starts to how it ends).



TERM TO KNOW

Chronological Paragraph

A paragraph that tells what happened in the order in which the events occurred.

1c. Emphatic

The third organizational model is the **emphatic paragraph**. In this structure, you'll organize your sentences based on how important each piece of information is. You might start by giving the least important facts and move to the most important ones, or you could switch that around and write from most to least important.

Emphatic paragraphs are a great tool when you're writing an argument and trying to convince your readers of something. If you're providing a number of supporting reasons for one claim, you might start with the most convincing argument and then move through to the least convincing one.

There are a few reasons why Saul's is the best sandwich shop in town. First and foremost, it has the most delicious sandwiches of any store around. Second, it has the greatest variety, so you can always find something you'll like. And finally, it has the best ambiance, so you'll always be comfortable there. Thus, Saul's is the place to be.

You can probably already spot that topic sentence and concluding sentence, and even find the supporting sentences. You'll also notice that in this argumentative paragraph, the author moves from the most essential reason to the least.



TERM TO KNOW

Emphatic Paragraph

A paragraph that organizes concepts based upon importance.

1d. TEE

The last paragraph structure is called the **TEE paragraph**. These paragraphs relay a set of facts, explanations, and analyses. Additionally, they contain a topic sentence, explanation, and examples, which is where this type of paragraph gets its name.

A TEE paragraph is a great choice when you're writing an informative paragraph because it will provide a lot of details. Just like all the other paragraphs, a TEE paragraph will have a topic sentence that is then supported by other sentences providing examples and explanations to help prove the main point.

Each of these examples will be a specific piece of information designed to support the topic sentence, and the explanations will be further details about that support that go beyond what is presented in the topic sentence. This kind of paragraph will generally start with more general information, and then move to more specific ideas. You'll have multiple examples and explanations, but only one main point announced in one topic sentence.

You might use a TEE paragraph if you were trying to inform someone with a dairy allergy about what they can order at Saul's deli.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A topic sentence for that paragraph might look like this: *Saul's has a variety of sandwiches you can order if you are allergic to dairy.* That sentence could then be followed with an example. *For example, the sourdough bread is dairy-free, so you can always choose that bread for any sandwich.*

The example sentence about the sourdough bread provides support for the main idea, and then offers some explanation for how that example justifies the topic sentence ("you can always choose that bread for any

sandwich.").

Now consider this as part of a larger paragraph.

Saul's has a variety of sandwiches you can order if you are allergic to dairy. For example, the sourdough bread is dairy-free, so you can always choose that bread for any sandwich. You can also easily ask for the cook to not put cheese on any sandwich. This means that most sandwiches can be made dairy-free. Therefore, Saul's is still a good restaurant even for someone with a dairy allergy.

As discussed above, the topic sentence is the first sentence, and tells us that the main idea of this paragraph is that Saul's Deli offers many dairy-free options. This is followed by the example sentence about the sourdough bread and the explanation of how it can be chosen for any sandwich.

Then, the author has added an additional example: *You can also easily ask for the cook to not put cheese on any sandwich.* Next comes the explanation for this example: *This means that most sandwiches can be made dairy-free.* Finally, the paragraph is summed up with a concluding sentence that ties everything together: *Therefore, Saul's is still a good restaurant even for someone with a dairy allergy.*

Let's now look at an entirely different paragraph. Notice that the underlined topic sentence opens the paragraph and gives a summary of what the main idea of the whole discussion is.

When preparing for an exam, there are a number of tricks that one might use to maximize chances for success. To start off with, students should study in a quiet and comfortable environment to ensure focus. Moreover, students should make use of all available resources, such as study guides and Q&A sessions. Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment, because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge. Altogether, these tricks will help students enter their exam feeling ready to master that challenge.

The topic sentence is followed by supporting sentences, which provide evidence for the main idea: *To start off with, students should study in a quiet and comfortable environment to ensure focus. Moreover, students should make use of all available resources, such as study guides and Q&A sessions. Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment, because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge.*

The example gives some detail that would help a reader trust that the statement made in the topic sentence is believable. The explanation clarifies the example, which all goes to prove to the reader that the example is true: *Most importantly, students should seek to build a supportive environment, because this can provide the encouragement we all need to face a challenge.*

Then of course, there is the concluding sentence, which offers a summary of the whole paragraph. In short, it wraps things up: *Altogether, these tricks will help students enter their exam feeling ready to master that challenge.*



Now it's your turn. Here is a paragraph with a topic sentence, concluding sentence, and three supporting sentences. However, these sentences are not in the right order. Can you spot the ingredients?

1. First, the host should make sure that the party invitation clearly informs guests about the dress code so that everyone shows up in costume.
2. In addition, the host should make sure that the decorations reflect the Halloween theme and therefore create a festive environment.
3. Overall, setting up these elements will assure the host of a spooky and fun soiree.
4. Throwing a fun Halloween party isn't very difficult as long as the host follows some basic guidelines.
5. And of course, the host should have a ton of snacks and drinks prepared, and if those are also themed, that's even better.

Which is the topic sentence?



It's the only sentence here that doesn't offer an example or sum up examples you've already seen, and it introduces the whole point of this paragraph. You can clearly say that this is the topic sentence:

Throwing a fun Halloween party isn't very difficult as long as the host follows some basic guidelines.

Which is the first supporting sentence?



To figure this out, look to the **transitions** in each sentence. Recall that transitions are the words, phrases, or sentences that clarify connections between ideas. Words such as "first" and "finally" indicate connection and movement. They are key transition terms.

See how the following sentence starts with "first?" That indicates that this is the first supporting example:

First, the host should make sure that the party invitation clearly informs guests about the dress code so that everyone shows up in costume.

What is the next supporting sentence?



The phrase "in addition" tells you that this is another piece that's being added to the support, so the sentence that would come next is:

In addition, the host should make sure that the decorations reflect the Halloween theme and therefore create a festive environment.

What is the last supporting sentence?



Therefore, the last supporting sentence is:

And of course, the host should have a ton of snacks and drinks prepared, and if those are also themed, that's even better.

What is the concluding sentence?



Looking at the transition word "overall," you can probably tell that the concluding sentence is: *Overall, setting up these elements will assure the host of a spooky and fun soiree.*

That transition word says that this is going to cover what happened over all of the rest of the sentences. Also, look at how it compares to the topic sentence. This summarizes what you've already been through in this TEE paragraph, whereas the topic sentence introduces what you're going to go through.



TERMS TO KNOW

TEE Paragraph

A paragraph that relays a set of facts, explanations, and analyses; it contains a topic sentence, explanation, and examples.

Transition

A word, phrase, or sentence that highlights a connection between ideas.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the four major **organizational structures for paragraphs**: **spatial**, **chronological**, **emphatic**, and **TEE**. Spatial paragraphs are used to examine details about a particular setting, person, or object; chronological paragraphs tell a story or series of events in the order that it happened; emphatic paragraphs organize their content based on importance; and TEE paragraphs provide a set of facts, explanations, and analysis through a topic sentence, explanation, and examples. You played around with the TEE model a little, learning how to put together the examples and explanations, and how to organize this kind of paragraph using transition words.

Best of luck in your learning!



TERMS TO KNOW

Chronological Paragraph

A paragraph that tells what happened in the order in which the events occurred.

Emphatic Paragraph

A paragraph that organizes concepts based upon importance.

Spatial Paragraph

A paragraph that examine the details in a particular setting or of a particular person or object.

TEE Paragraph

A paragraph that relays a set of facts, explanations, and analyses; it contains a topic sentence, explanation, and examples.

Transition

A word, phrase, or sentence that highlights a connection between ideas.