

---

# Paragraph types

Dr. Simon Krisztián  
[simon.krisztian@pte.hu](mailto:simon.krisztian@pte.hu)  
Institute of English Studies  
University of Pécs

---

This document focuses on providing an overview of a number of paragraph types that you can use in various essays. It builds on the topics established in the **paragraph writing** document and thus each paragraph will follow the five-sentence structure of **topic sentence** (1) – **support** (3) – **conclusion** (1). The paragraphs included in the document can be extended to essays (see **essay writing** document). All sample paragraphs serve illustrative purposes to show a possible solution with the five-sentence model and do not represent a single correct solution. Of course, the list of paragraphs in this document is not exhaustive as it only aims to discuss key types.

## Narrative paragraph

The main purpose of narrative paragraphs is to share a story and guide the reader through the most important steps. Anker (2010, p. 121) list the following points as the basis of narrative writing:

- “It reveals something of importance to you (your main point)”: this will be your **topic sentence**
- “It includes all of the major events of the story (primary support)”: these will be the **support**, as discussed in the **paragraph writing** document, three should provide enough context
- “It brings the story to life with details about the major events (secondary support)”: while such details can be important in a number of cases, if you have a word limit (e.g. a Proficiency Exam essay should be about 300-400 words long), you can simply include the secondary support as descriptive clauses in the primary support
- “It presents the events in a clear order, usually according to when they happened”: because you want to guide your reader through the main steps, by using a **chronological order** you can make sure they can follow your story without confusing time jumps

Keep in mind that a narrative paragraph needs to have events (primary support) presented usually in past tense and not just include a description of what happened (secondary support) to make sense.

**topic:** *tell a story about a time when listening to music did or did not make you happy*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- you do not need to define what happiness or sadness is
- you do not need to write about both being sad and happy because of music
- you can write about a specific time (*a single day*) or a time period (*a summer*)

---

Sample narrative paragraph focusing on a time period	Element
<i>My first summer job often made me sad but listening to music at the end of the day always managed to cheer me up.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>I worked in retail and encountered rude people with offensive remarks on a daily basis.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>The second half of the workdays always included heavy lifting in the store warehouse.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>By the end of the day, I was constantly sad and tired but the new playlists I would find on Spotify during my trips home made me forget this stressful job for the time being.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Listening to music made me happy during a difficult first job as it cleared my mind after each stressful day.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

---

**topic:** *tell a story to show whether beauty matters*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- a topic can require **narrative events**, be sure to signal the time with **adverbs** and **adjectives**

<b>Sample narrative paragraph focusing on a single day</b>	<b>Element</b>
<i>Beauty is one of those skills that you cannot put on your C.V. but can get you the job anyway.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>About <b>a week ago</b>, I found a job listing that was perfect for my skills and qualifications.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i><b>Next</b>, I spent hours <b>researching</b> everything to know about the company <b>before</b> the interview.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i><b>By the time</b> I got to the interview, the position was already given to a lovely young lady who was less qualified, but the company saw her as a better asset.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>In my experience with job interviews, beauty can provide edge over preparation.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

### Description paragraph

When you want to get across a certain concept situated in an experience, you can use a description paragraph. The main issues to keep in mind according to Anker (2010, p. 155) are as follows:

- “It creates a main impression – an overall effect, feeling, or image – about the topic”: when working on your **topic sentence** focus on the general picture of what you wish to describe
- “It uses specific examples to support the main impression”: with your **support** you will need to contextualize whatever you are describing for the reader to arrive at a similar impression
- “It supports those examples with details that appeal to the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch”: you do not need to include all five senses with descriptions, simply focus on the ones that would make sense in the context of your writing
- “It brings a person, place, or physical object to life for the reader”: this also mostly applies to experiences, however, the main idea, to provide enough detail for your reader, still stands

**topic:** *describe the entertaining or learning potential of Szenes*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- in terms of structure, this kind of descriptive paragraph is closer to an illustration paragraph
- you can complete such a paragraph without sensory details
- you can assume that the readers are familiar with Szenes, so you do not have to define it
- you need to write about the entertaining or learning potential, not both

<b>Sample description paragraph without sensory details</b>	<b>Element</b>
<i>The Szenes Club can be accessed throughout school days and parties and thus has a variety of entertainment possibilities.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>The club is open from morning until late afternoon, plus Monday evenings, and host a variety of programs from the well knows Monday parties to even improvisation nights.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>Although the club has computers that can be accessed free of charge to work on, the environment with its constant music and general buzz is not ideal for learning.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>However, you can always visit the place with some friends to watch a movie or simply play a board game.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Szenes is known for being a social place to unwind and have fun which is supported by its varied program line up.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

**topic:** *introduce a YouTube video you are familiar with*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- you can complete such a paragraph with sensory details (**sight**, **hearing**)
- as you are introducing a video, make sure your reader gets the core idea without having seen it

<b>Sample description paragraph with sensory details</b>	<b>Element</b>
<i>A YouTube video I know well, as I watch it a couple of times a year, is Harry Potter on Kinect from Call Me Kevin and his reactions to that buggy mess are simply hilarious.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>At the start, he tries to scan his face with the Kinect for the playable character, but it does not work and he <b>ends up looking like</b> a bad drawing for the rest of the game.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>Kevin adds out of context <b>music bits</b> and he also <b>changes his voice</b> for great jokes.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>It is also hilarious to <b>watch his restless movements</b> as the Kinect is motion controlled.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Harry Potter on Kinect was a hidden gem for me which the many programming bugs and the content creator's presentation make a joy to watch.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

### Illustration paragraph

An illustration paragraph is essentially the combination of a description and argumentation paragraph. Anker (2010, p. 139) lists the following as key features of illustrative writing:

- “It has a **point**”: as this will be your **topic sentence** make sure that you can provide adequate support and not just descriptions
- “It gives specific examples that show, explain, or prove the point”: your **support** will answer *why* questions about your topic sentence
- “It gives details to support examples”: include such details in separate sentences if absolutely necessary, otherwise simply incorporate them into your support sentences
- “It uses enough examples to get the point across to the reader”: while working on your prewriting, include the best three reasons that you can use to convince your reader

**topic:** *explain your attitude to video sharing sites in general*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- focus on describing your general attitude and do not go into detail about every such website
- be sure to present your attitude and not a general attitude

<b>Sample illustration paragraph</b>	<b>Element</b>
<i><b>My attitude</b> towards video sharing websites <b>is overwhelmingly positive</b> as I see them as possibly the best way of creating, sharing and accessing content.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>There are thousands of videos uploaded to YouTube everyday meaning there is always new content to consume.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>I follow a number of content creators whose work I could not access without YouTube.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>As a vlogger, YouTube provides a platform to share my work, get feedback and connect with people who with similar interests.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>I am a <b>big fan</b> of video sharing websites and they provide opportunities for watching and creating videos as well as getting in contact with the community.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

## Process analysis paragraph

Anker (2010, p. 171) explains that process analysis serves two goals, namely explaining “**how to do something** (...) [and] **how something works**”. While these are the primary uses of process analysis, it can also be used to discuss **change over time** such as how your understanding of a certain issues developed. In this case, it is similar to the combination of an illustration and narrative paragraph.

Process analysis essentially boils down to the following points (Anker, 2010, p. 171):

- “It tells readers what **process** you want them to know about and makes a point about it”: make sure your **topic sentence** clarifies the single process and what you have to say about it
- “It presents the **essential steps** in the process”: writing your **support** is similar to a recipe, think about what steps the reader will need to know about to understand your position introduced in the topic sentence
- “It explains the steps in detail”: how much detail you need depends on the topic and space limitations
- “It presents the steps in a logical order (usually time order)”: going back to the recipe analogy, it would not make sense to start a pizza recipe by ‘bake for 15 minutes until golden brown’, so make sure the order you use enables your reader to follow your points

**topic:** *explain how your views about beauty have been formed*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- make sure that your topic sentence specifies the change that the process will detail
- focus only on key steps that mark or prepare a change and present them in past tense

Sample process analysis paragraph	Element
<i>I used to think that <b>beauty is observable at first glance, however, I came to realize that it is multilayered.</b></i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>As a child, I grew up seeing billboards everywhere and associated looks with beauty.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>By the time I got to high school, I started to realize how this image might be limited.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>The real change came about during my university studies where I met different people and cultures that made me understand how beauty can be much more than simply looks.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Today I see <b>beauty as a construct with multiple levels</b> where looks are only one element.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

## Classification paragraph

In cases where you need to explain something that can be broken up into **subcategories**, a classification paragraph can be helpful. Such an approach will give your reader an insight into how you see the workings or possibilities of a given area. What you should pay attention to with classification are the following (Anker, 2010, p. 188):

- “It makes sense of a group of people or items by organizing them into categories”: these categories should make sense and not overwhelm your reader; as you will have your categories in your **support**, three should be enough
- “It has a purpose for sorting the people or items”: you need to express this **purpose** in the **topic sentence** (**main point:** *expressing how terrible bosses make your life difficult in many ways*)
- “It categorizes using a single organizing principle”: just as the purpose, this goes into your **topic sentence** (**narrowed topic:** *bosses → terrible bosses*)
- “It gives detailed examples or explanations of what fits into each category”: use your **support** to express these **categories** (*terrible boss types: irresponsible, impatient and unqualified*)

**topic:** explain what it means to be intelligent

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- you can use an illustration or even definition paragraph to tackle this topic
- with the classification approach you can present a more systematic overview

Sample classification paragraph	Element
<i>At the surface, intelligence seems to simply equal being smart, but it is a more complex construct.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>One distinction focuses on the logical (IQ) versus emotional (EQ) intelligence.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>Another approach is interpreting skill-based knowledge as intelligence.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>However, the most accurate results probably lie in the multiple intelligences theory covering almost a dozen different intelligences such as mathematical, linguistic, kinesthetic and so on.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Intelligence is more about the areas in which one can excel as opposed to the traditional IQ scores which show a more limited picture without personal differences.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

### Definition paragraph

Rather straightforward, a definition paragraph is a “writing that explains what a term or concept means” (Anker, 2010, p. 205). Such a paragraph is useful if you need to either define a term based on how you understand (e.g. *perfect hobby*) it or explaining how a concept you use should make sense (e.g. *rainy-day movies*). If you are writing a definition paragraph keep in mind the following (Anker, 2010, p. 205):

- “It tells the readers what is being defined”: this will be in the first half of your **topic sentence**
- “It presents a clear and basic definition”: this will make up the majority of your **topic sentence**
- “It uses examples to show what the writer means”: this will be your primary **support** which is enough in many cases, especially if you have space limitations
- “It gives details about the examples that readers will understand”: as your secondary **support**, you can include more context if your construct is somewhat ambiguous

**topic:** define what you see as the perfect hobby

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- focus on one hobby and do not combine multiple ones
- this is your idea of a perfect hobby and not a general agreement

Sample classification paragraph	Element
<i>As I see it, the perfect hobby is travelling as it includes visiting new places, experiencing various cultures and expanding your horizon.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>Travelling to a foreign country will give you a new perspective about the world</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>There is a lot to experience ranging from meeting new people, sightseeing, trying the local cuisine and so on.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>No matter where you go, you will always come back richer with experiences.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Travelling is a universal hobby that everyone can enjoy in more ways and is thus a prime candidate for being the perfect hobby.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

## Comparison and contrast paragraph

The basic distinction to keep in mind when working on such a paragraph is that **comparison** “shows the **similarities** among subjects – people, ideas, situations, or items”, however, **contrast** “shows the **differences**” (Anker, 2010, p. 221). A possible reason for using comparison and contrast approach can be to establish how two subjects (*intelligence* and *success*) can be present in the same system (*life goals*) and discuss their similarities and differences. The following points can help you shape your comparison and contrast paragraph (Anker, 2010, p. 221):

- “It uses subjects that have enough in common to be compared/ contrasted in a useful way”: this is the basic organizing principle of your **topic sentence** → **narrowed topic**
- “It serves a purpose – either to help readers make a decision or to help them understand the subjects”: this is the position you want to express with your **topic sentence** → **main point**
- “It presents several important, parallel point of comparison/ contrast”: include the most important parallels in your **support**
- “It arranges points in a logical order”: you can pick a number of orders for your logical presentation, such as chronological (before-after), starting with the least important or starting with the most important; just be sure to pick one logical order and not a combination of more

**topic:** *compare and contrast your first phone with your current one*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- a specific timeframe (e.g. ten years) can set up a reasonable **comparison/ contrast** window
- as you are looking at **similarities** and **differences**, make sure you include a main point in your topic sentence that can focus on both
- you can even end your paragraph with a **recommendation** included in your conclusion

Sample comparison/ contrast paragraph	Element
<i>My first and current phones illustrate how a decade of technological development affect user experience.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>The most obvious <b>difference</b> is how current smartphones are much <b>larger</b> than phones from the late 2000s.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>Of course, using older devices is severely <b>limited</b> due to basic or disclosed app support.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>However, if one only needs a phone to <b>make calls and send text messages</b>, even a ten-year-old device will suffice, as <b>both old and new phones</b> have these features.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Smartphones are constantly extending their usability, yet if one only requires basic phone features, even <b>an older device will do the job</b> at a fraction of the price.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

## Cause and effect paragraph

In cases where you need to illustrate why a **change** happened and its **results**, you can do so with a cause and effect paragraph. The basic distinction is between **cause**, which is “what made an event happen”, and an **effect** which is “what happens as a result of the event” (Anker, 2010, p. 239). Keep in mind the following points when structuring your cause and effect paragraph (Anker, 2010, p. 239):

- “The main point reflects the writer’s purpose: to explain causes, effects or both”: your **topic sentence** should incorporate what brought about a given change and what it resulted in
- “If the purpose is to explain **causes**, it presents real causes”: based on how your **topic sentence** emphasizes the cause-effect roles, your **support** will need to reflect your focus; for example, a

topic like *discuss what made you change your mind about adopting a pet* looks at how a given event, your **cause** in this case, could have happened and your **support** will thus focus on the pre-event (**pre-event**) factors that led to it, such as *loving animals, wanting to save one, need for company*

- “If the purpose is to explain **effects**, it presents real effects”: just as with the previous case, your **topic sentence** needs to establish your focus and here your **support** will center on **post-event** factors that happened because of the event; for example a topic like *discuss how adopting an animal changed your life* can come with results like *increased responsibility, changed life rhythm, experiencing an animal’s affection*
- “It gives readers detailed examples or explanations of the causes or effects”: make sure that you can provide adequate **support** for either the **cause** or **effects**

**topic:** *explain how your views about fairness have been formed*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- as the topic focuses on changes in views, this can be approached with expressing the **cause** (a **central event**) in the topic sentence and the support illustrating the **effects** (**results of the event**)
- neither the event nor the results have to be positive for the paragraph to make sense
- in cases such as this topic, where you go through the steps how your views changed, your effects will have similarities with a narrative structure so be sure to use past tense

Sample cause and effect paragraph	Element
<i>A meeting with one of my professors concerning a failed paper made me reevaluate my stance on fairness.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>We spent quite some time on identifying its issues and how it could be improved.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>After this discussion I had a better understanding of what to keep and what to change.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>Seeing how I was actively trying to improve my work, my professor offered to assess my revised essay and consider it as 50% of the final grade I would get for my paper.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>This meeting with my professor and the offered chance to improve my grade had a highly positive effect on how I see fairness today.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

### Argument paragraph

An argument paragraph has one central role, namely that it “takes a position on an issue and gives supporting evidence to **persuade** someone else to accept, or at least to consider, the position” (Anker, 2010, p. 258). Such a paragraph will work the following way (Anker, 2010, p. 258):

- “It takes a strong and definite position”: this is essentially your **topic sentence**, so make sure you can provide support to convince your potential reader that your position is valid
- “It gives good reasons and **supporting evidence** to defend the position”: the bulk of your **support** will focus contextualizing your position and trying to persuade your reader
- “It considers **opposing views**”: including the other side in your arguments and accepting their validity strengthens your overall **support**
- “It has enthusiasm and energy from start to finish”: your arguments can be highly valid if presented in a calm manner, so this feature can be left out from writing argument paragraphs without losing anything

**topic:** *discuss whether intelligence makes us successful*

A few things to keep in mind when working on your paragraph:

- you need to decide on the kind of connection you will argue for between intelligence and success
- by not taking either extreme (always connected – never connected), you can provide a position that is more life-like, easier to support and includes opposing sides
- you can provide examples in your support by mentioning famous people that your reader will likely be familiar with

<b>Sample argument paragraph</b>	<b>Element</b>
<i>The relationship between intelligence and success is not straightforward as it may not lead to the kind of success one originally might want.</i>	<b>topic sentence</b>
<i>Some of the wealthiest people, like <b>Bill Gates and Elon Musk</b>, had success in the <b>business sphere</b> because of their intelligence.</i>	<b>support #1</b>
<i>However, there are celebrities who <b>became successful because of their looks alone</b>.</i>	<b>support #2</b>
<i>While intelligence in itself does not necessarily lead to financial gains, it can present acknowledgement in science, breakthrough discoveries and cementing your name which are all forms of success.</i>	<b>support #3</b>
<i>Thus, intelligence does not guarantee success, but it is one possible way to achieve it.</i>	<b>conclusion</b>

## References

Anker, S. (2010). *Real writing with readings: Paragraphs and essays for college, work and everyday life*. Boston: St. Martin's.