

CHAPTER SIX

PARAGRAPHS AND THEMES

The Paragraph

Definition of a Paragraph:

A group of sentences which are examples of the general idea of the topic sentence.

Definition of a Topic Sentence:

One sentence, usually the first sentence of the paragraph, which tells the reader what the paragraph will discuss. The topic sentence is never a question. The topic sentence is never in two or three parts.

Definition of an Introductory Sentence:

The first sentence of the paragraph. This sentence should be the topic sentence.

Definition of Body Sentences:

The sentences which are between the first sentence and last sentence of the paragraph. They give specific examples (things that a reader can see, feel, touch, smell, or hear) which support the topic sentence's idea. Normally, these examples should provide three specific examples that support the topic sentence.

Definition of Concluding Sentence:

The last sentence of the paragraph can be a summary (summarizing the three key points in the body), prediction (a logical conclusion based on what is in the body), or question (the reader can easily find the answer in the body).

Definition of Good Paragraph Development:

The details in the body of the paragraph should be very specific. If a writer devotes two to five sentences to every example in the body, s/he will have achieved solid paragraph development.

Outline

- A. Topic Sentence:** My wedding day was beautiful for different reasons.
- B. Examples of the Topic Sentence:**
1. weather
 2. ceremony
 3. people
- C. Concluding Sentence:** My wedding day was beautiful because of the weather, ceremony, and people.

My wedding day was beautiful for different reasons. I married in December. It had snowed five days before. However, it did not snow on that day. Great! The day was sunny and cold. The ceremony was a candlelight ceremony. The candles' glow gave a solemn effect in the church. The organist played beautiful songs. The soloist sang "The Lord's Prayer." She sounded lovely. Then, my husband and I said our vows. We shall never forget each other's words. Of course, there was the minister. His words inspired us. After the ceremony, we had a big party. We danced and danced and danced. The guests, bridesmaids, groomsmen, ushers, hostesses, band members, and hotel workers were very cooperative. Therefore, my wedding day was beautiful because of the weather, the ceremony, and people.

The Theme

There are different kinds of themes. They fall into four main categories: expository (presenting facts), argumentative (trying to persuade), narrative (telling a story), and descriptive (providing in-depth details about a certain item or situation). In college, instructors will, for the most part, expect exposition. In certain cases, they will expect you to "take a stand"; this will require argumentation. The focus of this book is mainly on the expository theme (also, referred to as an essay) with examples of two of the remaining three. It is in college or high school that your instructors can provide intense instruction on all four main types of discourse. Again, this handbook aims to give you the bare basics to help you survive until you get that detailed instruction. OK??

Definition of a Theme: A group of paragraphs which develop the three main points of the thesis sentence.

Definition of a Thesis Sentence: One sentence, usually the last sentence of the introductory paragraph, which contains three main points. This sentence should clearly specify the theme's main purpose. The thesis NEVER asks a question. It is best to make it the last sentence of your introductory paragraph.

Definition of the Introductory Paragraph: The first paragraph of the theme. It should let the reader know the basis for your discussion of the topic. You should state the thesis in this paragraph.

Definition of Topic Sentence in a Theme: Each topic sentence should develop only one of the thesis points. It should be a general statement, NEVER a question.

Definition of Body Paragraphs: The paragraphs which are between the introductory and concluding paragraphs, usually, are three. There can be more. Each body paragraph should provide three specific examples of one of the points of the thesis. Furthermore, to make certain that each is well-developed, you need to devote a minimum of two sentences per example. And for you not to write too much, do not write more than five sentences per example.

Definition of the Concluding Paragraph: The last paragraph of the theme. It should summarize and state the significance of the ideas presented in the paper.

Sample Comparison of Paragraph and Theme

Note: Although both discuss the same topic, notice the difference in the depth of the discussion. The theme goes into more details.

Sample Paragraph

Different things are important to people. First, for many people money is most important. They feel that money can get the things they want. They feel these things will make them happy. Next, careers are most important to some people. They will work from sunrise to sunset. They take work home from the office. They take work on vacations. Finally, there are peo-

ple who feel that family and friends are important. They treasure the time that they spend with their parents, spouses, children, other relatives, and friends. They prefer to see their niece in a kindergarten play rather than make extra money working overtime. Thus, money, careers, or family is most important to most people.

Sample Theme

What is most important? As people get older, they tend to consider this question. In many cases, they notice a change in their attitude. As a new college graduate, a person may feel getting that great job is paramount. However, facing a few tough times, that same person may see it is the support of family and friends that is most significant. Therefore, money, careers, or family is the most important to an individual.

First, money is most important to some people. Some want things. They want the sports car, the six-bedroom, Tudor-styled home, and designer clothes. Others want money so they can travel. With money people can travel to the Smokies, scale the peaks of Kilimanjaro, or bathe in the waters of Tahiti on a cruise. Then, others want money for education. Needless to say, money can help people provide an education for their loved ones or themselves. Since money has the potential to provide tangibles, travel, and tutelage, it is significant to many.

Careers are another item of importance. Some people are trying to move up the corporate ladder. Some want to become the chief of surgeons at a major hospital. Others want to become famous actors or actresses. If it is necessary that they miss their son's first performance in the National Little League World Series, they will. If the boss asks them to postpone a family vacation (planned six months before), they will. If they feel they will get a promotion by using another person's idea for a project, they will. Unfortunately, the career's importance outweighs that of the family; disappointments occur.

On the other hand, family and friends are most important to many people. These individuals will always visit the aunt or uncle in a retirement home. They look forward to the holiday get-togethers. They go to the recital of a friend's daughter. They know that both the friend and the child want them there. They provide the moral, emotional, and economic support to a friend or family member whenever the situation warrants. People who value friends and family above everything have learned that no amount of money or job will give the comfort and love that people whom they hold dear can. Probably, these people are the most

content?

Every person must determine what is most important for himself/herself. It may be wealth, professional position, or loved ones. Still, in a quiet moment of every individual, s/he will answer the question. Possibly, the lure of being able to do whatever s/he wants with no financial restrictions will guide his/her answer. Then, again, the power of a position may satisfy his/her need. Still, for another, s/he will hold dear above all else the people who touch his/her life so intimately. Ultimately, it is the latter that will give most people the most wealth and power—wealth of family and friends and the power of love.

A Quick Guide to Writing A Theme

- 1. Write the very last sentence of the theme first! The last sentence should state what is the real reason you are writing your paper; it serves as the philosophy or “soul” of your paper. Once you know what you really want to convey to the reader in this paper—why this subject is so very important—then, this sentence will guide you throughout the writing of the theme. Write this sentence on a sheet of paper and look at it as you begin to write every paragraph. Then, make it the last sentence of your paper.**
- 2. Choose a topic you like.**
- 3. Think of three items you would like to discuss about the topic.**
- 4. Sketch an outline; if you cannot think of three specific examples about each item, then, change the item.**
- 5. For every specific example, you should devote two to five sentences developing each example so that it is very specific—something a person can see, touch, taste, smell, or hear.**
- 6. The introductory paragraph should set the tone for your paper and gain the reader’s attention.**
- 7. The concluding paragraph should reiterate your key points and emphasize the purpose for the paper—the “soul” of the paper.**

The Outline

I must be honest with you. As a high school student, I detested having to do an outline. However, one of my favorite English teachers, Sister Mary Dolores, helped me recognize its purpose. I decided if I ever became an English teacher I would try to make the outline more functional and worthwhile (from my point of view). There are many different ways to outline. I am only sharing the one that I have devised for my students. After many years of using this format, hundreds of students have shared with me and with other teachers who have used this format, that it helps them set up themes and speeches.

The important point this author wishes to make here is it is very important that you outline BEFORE writing your theme (essay). Do you ever feel that your ideas are going every “whichway” but getting no where? The outline can help you avoid this frustration. You should see the outline as the blueprint to your house (the theme). No reputable contractor builds a house without a blueprint. Thus, no student wishing to be a decent writer should write a theme without some kind of outline. The format I have in this handbook is just one of the many tools one can use to organize his/her thoughts before writing the paper.

Outline

Step I. Thesis Sentence: Upon my death in order for several people to remember me favorably, I have tried to be kind, honest, and hard-working.

Step II. Body Paragraphs:

A1. Topic Sentence: First, I would like people to remember me as being kind.

1. Say hello to strangers
2. Compliment people
3. Accentuate the positive aspects of people

A2. Concluding Sentence: Is it any wonder why I consider myself kind?

B1. Topic Sentence: Next, I would like people to remember me as being honest.

1. Give back change if incorrect
2. Turn in lost wallet to authorities
3. Never cheat on tests

B2. Concluding Sentence: Therefore, because I give back change, turn in lost articles, and never cheat, people can remember me as being honest.

C1. Topic Sentence: Last, I would like people to remember me as being very hardworking.

1. Award from McDonald's
2. Award from Mervyn's
3. Chores at home

C2. Concluding Sentence: From the awards earned and my consistent work at my home, these show I will always continue to work intensely.

Step III. Concluding Paragraph—Topic Sentence: My actions reflect my personality traits.

1. I am a kind person who interacts well with

others in various situations.

- 2. I am an honest person who tries not to take advantage of others' mistakes.**
- 3. I am a very hard-working person who enjoys work and often gets praised for it.**

Concluding Sentence—The “so what” or “soul” sentence: In order for several people to remember me the way I wish, I must live that way now.

Living As I Wish to be Remembered

Boy, I suck! No, I am just kidding. I am actually the exact opposite. I believe in treating others how I would like to be treated. I am not worried about being a cutthroat person. Upon my death in order for several people to remember me favorably, I shall be kind, honest, and hard-working.

First, I would like several people to remember me as being kind. I make a point to say hello to strangers. I never feel awkward doing this. I compliment people on their abilities. I always try to find something noteworthy about a person. I focus on a person's team spirit or a colorful shirt worn or a bright smile. I, also, try to accentuate the positive aspects of people. Instead of focusing on the fact that a person is unable to complete a portion of a project, I look at what the person has accomplished. For example, I comment on the part of a car painted rather than that part the person has not finished. I never look at the negative. Is it any wonder why I consider myself kind?

Next, I would like people to remember me as being honest. When shopping, I give back excess change if the cashier has made a mistake. I know and empathize with the difficulty of being a cashier. I turn in wallets or lost articles when I find them. If I lost my wallet, I would hope that someone would turn it in directly to the proper authorities. I, also, never cheat on tests. I believe in earning my grade. If I prepare for the test and do well, I deserve a decent grade. If I do not prepare and do poorly, I deserve a poor grade. I am a strong believer that one must face the consequences of her actions. Therefore, because I give back change, turn in lost articles, and never cheat, people can remember me as being honest.

Finally, I would like people to remember me as being very hard-working. I received an award from McDonald's for being a “top-notch” crew member. I was also selected to its “All-Amer-

ican Team,” and I received a pin for my efforts. I, also, received an award from Target. I was selected as the store’s most incredible new hire for the month of October. In addition to working, I, also, have chores to do at home. I clean the house thoroughly, washing the walls, scrubbing the floors, and cleaning the baths. My reward is a neat-looking home. From the awards earned and mu consistentwork at my home, these show I will always continue to work intensely.

My actions reflect my personality traits. After I am dead, if I want several persons to think of me fondly, while alive I should be nice, truthful, and dedicated. I do not suck! I am a kind person who interacts well with others in various situations. I am an honest person who tries not to take advantage of other people’s mistakes. I am a very hard-working person who enjoys work and often gets praised for it. In order for several people to remember me the way I wish, I must live that way now.

—Sarah Lovins

English 101

GUIDELINES for an INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Many writers can write interesting body paragraphs. However, they have difficulty starting and ending the theme. Yes, there are many ways you can start your papers. Your English instructor or tutor can show the many ways. This handbook provides specific guidelines for one method. If you follow these guidelines, you will do fine until your instructor/tutor gives you examples of the other ways. As a matter of fact, you will do fine if you never use another way. Still, a more polished writer should know how to vary his/her style of writing. That is why you should pursue your learning of how to write in a formal situation. OK? Let’s start.

Sentence 1: Get the reader’s attention;

Sentence 2: Give background information that will explain the reason for the thesis;

Sentence 3: Give more background information or definitions of terms used in the paper that the reader may not understand;

Sentence 4: Make a comment about one of the thesis points;

Sentence 5: Make a comment about another thesis point;

Sentence 6: The thesis sentence—this sentence is **NEVER** a question; it gives an answer; it states an opinion.

The above is **NOT THE ONLY** way to develop an introductory paragraph. One can do the following:

1. **Develop a short story (6-8 sentences) with the thesis at the end of the story; with the thesis at the end, the main point/s of the paper will be clear;**
2. **Develop a four-sentence overview of what the paper will cover, allowing for the thesis to be the last sentence;**
3. **Develop a four-to five-sentence fact-based paragraph that ends with a thesis focusing on those two or three fact-points the paper will develop;**
4. **Some instructors are comfortable with only the thesis beginning the paper;**
5. **Some instructors are comfortable with no stated thesis; however, if you choose this method, you must be certain that you write the paper in such a way that the thesis, the main point/s you want the reader to grasp, are CLEARLY implied. If this does not occur, your paper will lack focus and imply you do not understand your subject matter. Unless you are a very accomplished writer, it is best ALWAYS to state the thesis in the first paragraph of your paper, preferably making it the last sentence.**

GUIDELINES for a CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

- Sentence 1:** Write a good topic sentence;
- Sentence 2:** Write the three ideas of the thesis with different words;
- Sentence 3:** Look at the introductory paragraph; write one sentence that relates to sentence 1 of the introductory paragraph;
- Sentence 4:** Summarize body paragraph 1;
- Sentence 5:** Summarize body paragraph 2;
- Sentence 6:** Summarize body paragraph 3;
- Sentence 7:** Tell the reader why you wrote the theme; when the reader finishes reading your theme, what do you want the reader to remember?? Whatever the answer is to this question; this should be the last sentence of the concluding paragraph. Review “Sentence 1 on page 141.

NOTE: There are several different ways to set up the introductory and concluding paragraphs. The author would suggest for beginner writers to use the above as a guide until given formal training. The above will suffice under various circumstances until taught other methods of development by trained individuals.

Some of the other methods for developing the concluding paragraph are:

- 1. Develop a short story (six-eight sentences) that illustrates the main points presented in the paper; the last sentence should emphasize the points of the whole paper;**
- 2. Develop a brief (four-five sentences) summary of what the paragraphs of the theme have presented;**
- 3. Develop a concluding paragraph that discusses the ramifications of the facts presented in the body of the paper, ending with a strong “call to action”;**

4. For those of you who choose to write a paper with no stated thesis, it will be very important that the concluding paragraph makes it very clear the purpose of the paper and what action, if any, you wish the reader to perform based on the content of the paper.

Whatever method you choose to write your concluding paragraph, that last sentence should be impactful; it should really force your reader to understand the purpose of those body paragraphs; it should be the “provocative closer” of the whole paper.

PLEASE REMEMBER: An introductory paragraph nor a concluding paragraph is well-developed if it is less than four sentences. As a matter of fact, except for a transitional paragraph, no paragraph is well-developed if it contains only three sentences or less. A transitional paragraph is used when there is a very long paper that needs transitions between paragraphs. This occurs when you write a research paper that does not delineate (separate) its sections with titles.

The following contains the outline, the introductory paragraph, one body paragraph, and concluding paragraph of a theme to serve as another example. It shows how key paragraphs follow what has been discussed regarding these paragraphs’ development.

Outline

Step I. Thesis Sentence: Zita is a romantic, goal-oriented, and committed person.

Step II. Body Paragraphs:

A1. Topic Sentence: First of all, she is a romantic.

1. candlelight dinners
2. surprise get-away weekends
3. surprise Christmas present

A2. Concluding Sentence: She is a romantic because she sets up special dinners, arranges surprise weekends, and gives presents.

B1. Topic Sentence: Also, Zita is goal-oriented.

1. chairperson of committees
2. earning Ph.D.
3. conceiving child

B2. Concluding Sentence: Her being a chair, earning a doctorate, and conceiving a child are examples of her ability to focus.

C1. Topic Sentence: Finally, Zita is a person who believes in commitment.

1. friendship—tries to help asthmatic friend
2. daughter—tries not to embarrass parents
3. wife—tries to be supportive during challenging times

C2. Concluding Sentence: The way she tries to be a good friend, daughter, and wife shows her commitment.

Step III. Concluding Paragraph—Topic Sentence: Zita is a person made up of various characteristics.

1. She is a woman who likes to show romance.
2. She is a woman who sets long and short-range goals.
3. She is a woman who commits herself to people.

Concluding Sentence—“So-what” Sentence: Indeed, no individual is uni-dimensional; definitely, my friend is multi-dimensional because of her various roles.

Zita Cecilia Regis is a complex individual. People who know her say she is predictable and unpredictable. Every time they think they know what she will do, they do not. In the intimacy of her home, she tries avante-gardé things. Any person who knows her as a friend knows he or she can depend on her. Thus, Zita Cecilia Regis is a romantic, goal-oriented, and committed person.

First of all, she is a romantic. Her husband is never quite sure what she may do. While he is looking at TV, she may be dressing up in her pink, see-through negligee. Then, she serves him his favorite meal by candlelight. Next, she may plan a getaway trip to a hotel. He'll get home; she will have his clothes packed. Then, she may say, “Babe, we're leaving! Surprise!”

Zita is a person made up of various characteristics. She is a woman who sets long and short-range goals. She is a woman who commits herself to people. Indeed, no individual is uni-dimensional; most definitely, my friend is multi-dimensional because of her various roles.

NOTE 1: Of course, one of the most important sentences of a theme is the thesis sentence. Once you have this sentence in mind, it guides you in your development of all of the other paragraphs of the paper.

NOTE 2: Another very important sentence is the LAST SENTENCE of the paper. It should pull together all of what you have discussed in the full paper. It should state the purpose of the theme. In other words, this sentence should tell a reader what s/he should have learned from reading your theme.

It is a good process to determine the last sentence (the “so-what” or “soul” sentence) and the thesis sentence BEFORE you begin to write the paper.

NOTE 3: As a beginner (sometimes, for non-beginners, too), you will find it beneficial to set up some kind of outline before actually writing the paper. You do not have to follow the format that is in this book. However, if you have not had an instructor that has taught you some kind of format, it would be to your advantage to use the one in this handbook until you have devised one of your own. Besides a blueprint, the outline serves as a road map to your academic destination. Most people do not embark on a road trip without a map or GPS. It is less likely you and your readers will become lost. So, let outline serve as your academic road map or academic GPS.

A Suggestion

Mr. Massie shared with the author at one of their conferences his method for getting his papers started. This occurs before following the guidelines for writing a quality introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs. Do you use a similar method?

Paper Planning

One method of forming a thesis is to brainstorm!

Example Column

Space Travel

rockets

fuel

history of space travel

satellites

space flights

flight problems

NASA

Next, after narrowing the topic, select one of the possibilities and form 3 points to include in the thesis (this may require more brainstorming).

Space Flights

Sputnik

Apollo 13

Jupiter 1

Jupiter 2

John Glenn

Cosmonauts

Mir

Astronauts

Form the thesis sentence:

Therefore, the world has gained a lot from the space travel of Glenn, the men of Apollo 13, and the astronauts on Spaceship Mir.

SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs for “Sports Medicine”

It’s all over!!! THERE IS NO HOPE!!! IT IS NOW THE END!!! These are thoughts some athletes may believe when they are injured on the playing field. Good news—sports injuries do not always mean it is the end of playing. Although it can take much time and patience, therapeutic medicine is an alternative. Another type would be medicines for the treatment of common injuries which unlike therapeutic medicines may only take a few days to heal. Through sports medicines such as surgical medicine, therapeutic medicine, and the medicine for the treatment of common injuries, athletes can continue to play and enjoy sports and exercise.

An injury from playing a sport or exercising does not mean the end of enjoying those activities. The athlete can still enjoy and play sports after injuries because of surgical medicines, therapeutic medicines, and the medicines for the treatment of common injuries. It is not all over; there is always hope; it is never the end. Undergoing surgery gives injured athletes, in time, the ability to return to play sports. With a lot of time, patience, and self-discipline, athletes can continue to use muscles and re-

move pain through different kinds of therapies. With only a few weeks or even a few days, the treatment for common injuries can keep the athlete from sacrificing too much lost time out there on the field. Having knowledge of the different kinds of sports medicines that are available today can save the careers and/or even the lives of anyone who is active in any kind of sport or exercise.
—Diana Keller, English 101

Thesis Sentence and Concluding Paragraph

Thesis Sentence and Concluding Paragraph of “Drinking and Driving”

For drunk drivers, who may not recognize their possible impairment, prevention needs to come from the intervention of others, from various groups speaking to the issue of drunk driving, and from the alcohol producers themselves.

Ultimately, the decision to drink and drive lies with the people who have been drinking and have the car keys in hand. People who intervene, groups who expound on not drinking and driving, and even the alcohol industry itself must send clear messages to stop drinking and driving. People make uneducated decisions for the wrong reasons and wind up doing something

tragically wrong. The people who have been drinking need to stop and listen to those around them who are saying that a drinker may not be capable of driving safely. The drinkers need to look more closely at the messages being sent via the media urging them to consider the consequences of driving drunk. The message sent by the alcohol industry says to drink responsibly to avoid making the wrong decision. When personal responsibility fails to keep the drunk driver off the road, society must intervene at various levels and become aggressively creative to prevent the repeat drunk driver from making yet another mistake.

—John Bienlein

English 101

Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs of “It’s Not Their Fault”

“Jack Sprat could eat no fat; his wife could eat no lean” (Mother Goose 40). These opening lines from a 17th century Mother Goose rhyme illustrate that differences between couples can be complimentary. Unfortunately, this does not hold true in abusive relationships. The partners being battered, who in the overwhelming number of cases are women, suffer physical and emotional damage, which bewilders those outside their relation-

ships. One result is that victimized females receive insensitive treatment from institutions. Besides institutional insensitivity, motives for remaining in abusive relationships, and methods of dealing with abuse are issues relevant to abused women.

The problem of female abuse is ubiquitous. Insensitivity, ignorance, and limited means of dealing with this situation are issues deserving thoughtful consideration. Like Jack Sprat's wife, women often remain nameless, seen as able, but unwilling to remove themselves from desperate relationships, their problems left to stagnate in the backwaters of social ills. Some institutions exacerbate their complex problems. Society regards their eminently rational behavior with perplexity, failing to understand the fundamental causes. Changes in medical practices have helped, but more is needed. Unless the problems engulfing battered women are better understood and accepted by society, minimal improvement of their situation is the most that they can expect.

-Ronald Massie

English 101

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW FOR CHAPTER SIX

- 1. If you are not familiar with any other format for setting up an introductory paragraph, what is the six-sentence method for developing a solid introductory paragraph (141)?**
- 2. If you are not a “rookie,” what are five other ways to set up an introductory paragraph (142)?**
- 3. What is the best position to place the thesis sentence (135)?**
- 4. Can a thesis sentence ever be a question (135)?**
- 5. Can a topic sentence ever be a question (135)?**
- 6. If you are not familiar with any other format for setting up a concluding paragraph, what is the seven-sentence method for developing a solid concluding paragraph (143)?**
- 7. What is the value of outlining first (138; 146)?**
- 8. How many specific examples should be in every body paragraph (135)?**
- 9. What is the difference between writing a paragraph and a theme (133; 134-135)?**
- 10. Why is the last sentence of the theme important (143; 144)?**