



WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is a group of sentences which all talk about one topic or subject or idea. Sometimes a paragraph can stand alone. In this case, all the sentences will talk about only one thing. If a paragraph contains sentences which all discuss one idea, the paragraph is said to possess **UNITY**. Unity means that there is only one idea in the paragraph. The sentences in the paragraph do not talk about any other ideas, only the main idea.

The main idea of the paragraph is stated in the **TOPIC SENTENCE**. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in the paragraph, but it does not have to be. Sometimes the topic sentence may be in the second, third, fourth or even the last sentence in a paragraph. A writer who pays attention to the topic sentence and writes a good one will ensure that the paragraph possesses unity. The **CONCLUDING SENTENCE** is not only the last sentence in the paragraph, but it has another job: It sums up the main idea of the paragraph.

But the sentences in the paragraph also have to be arranged in order that makes some sense. This arrangement of sentences is called **COHERENCE**. If a paragraph possesses coherence, then one sentence will lead logically to another. The writer will not skip around or jump from one idea to another. There are many different ways to create coherence in a paragraph and some of these are discussed in the next few pages.

A good paragraph is one which contains unity and coherence. The ideas are presented in the topic sentence and summed up in the concluding sentence.

Usually, a paragraph does not stand alone. It is part of a longer piece of writing which consists of several (or sometimes many) paragraphs. The connected paragraph is discussed in a later section of this resource.

A Paragraph up Close and Personal

Although paragraphs may have different subjects, they all share the same structure.

Title: tells about the subject of the paragraph and interests the reader

The Midnight Ride of Sybil Luddington

Topic sentence: tells what the paragraph will be about (usually the first sentence or a sentence near the beginning of the paragraph)

Like Paul Revere, sixteen-year-old Sybil Luddington saved the day by taking a midnight ride during the American Revolution.

Transition word: helps connect the sentences in the paragraph

On April 26, 1777, the British attacked Danbury, Connecticut. They began to burn the Americans' houses and possessions. **Soon**, the British would find and destroy the American militia's weapons stored in the town. Many of the colonial militia in the area were farmers. They were at home because it was planting season. A messenger rode to the house of Henry Luddington with the news.

Luddington decided to call the militia to meet at his house by morning. When the messenger said he and his horse were too tired to ride and tell everyone in the countryside, Sybil Luddington volunteered to go. In the darkness of night, she rode for more than forty miles on mostly unfamiliar roads, stopping only long enough to bang on shutters and shout her message.

By the next morning, nearly all of the colonial militia had gathered at the Luddingtons' house. Soon they were on the march. **Thanks to Sybil Luddington, the British were driven out of Danbury.**

Body (sentences 2-11): contains the detail sentences

Transition phrase: gives a sense of time and order of events

Concluding sentence: wraps up the topic sentence (usually the last sentence in the paragraph)