

The paragraph in academic writing

The paragraph in academic writing

Definition

A group of related sentences that develop ONE main idea

Structure

Topic sentence

Purpose: to introduce the main idea of the paragraph and locate the paragraph in the overall text

Means: often includes an abstract noun

Scientific concept

e.g. demand and supply; erosion; ill health in remote areas

General abstract noun

e.g. six **factors**; three main **reasons**; one **problem**

Supporting sentences

Purpose: to elaborate the main idea

Means

1. Explaining and predicting consequences using one or more cause and effect sequences
2. Giving examples
3. Describing how things are – aspects, features, characteristics
4. Describing results of an investigation
5. Recording change over time
6. Using a combination of 1-5

Concluding sentence (not always present)

Purpose: to bring together the supporting information and present it with a new perspective

Means: often includes an abstract noun that characterises the support
e.g. advantages; problems; paradox

Exercise.

Underline the abstract noun if there is one in the topic sentence. Identify the type of elaboration in the supporting sentences.

- a. The economic benefits of the timber industry are another argument for logging. Forest industries claim that they employ 300,000 people and have contributed about \$327 million a year to the economy. Without these industries many people would lose their jobs and the economy of the country would suffer greatly.
- b. The first and most obvious influence of women was on the social welfare of the colonies. Caroline Chisholm is an example of a woman who worked tirelessly to improve conditions for women. In the early 1900s women were greatly outnumbered by men. As a result many unmarried women from England were given financial incentives to immigrate. However, little thought was given to what to do with them once they arrived. Consequently many suffered homelessness and unemployment. Caroline Chisholm found jobs for female passengers, set up an immigrants' home and lobbied governments. This led to more provisions being provided for the care and settlement of these women.

The paragraph in academic writing

- c. During 1903 and 1904, a series of failed diplomatic moves led to Japan breaking off diplomatic relations soon after war broke out. In April 1904, Russia was defeated at the Yalu River, and in January 1905, Port Arthur fell. Then in May, Russia's Baltic fleet was annihilated at Tsushima. Following this, Japan replaced Russia as the dominant power in southern Manchuria and received enormous prestige from the victory.

- d. Feathertail gliders are known as diprotodont marsupial, characterised by their herbivorous dentition. The feathertail glider is widely distributed in the tall, well-watered eucalypt forests of the eastern coast. Although arboreal, it is not restricted to the forest canopy and often forages through the shrub layer. The gliding membrane, which extends from the elbow to the knee, is smaller and thicker than in any other gliding marsupial. The large pads on the toes have a finely serrated structure which enables it to cling to smooth surfaces.