AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARAGRAPH

NAME

________________________________________

DATE

________________________________________
I. WHAT A PARAGRAPH LOOKS LIKE

In a paragraph, the first line is indented. The other lines start at the left margin.

EXERCISE A

Look at the following diagrams. Circle the letter of the diagram that shows what a paragraph looks like (what form the paragraph has).
II. THE PARAGRAPH HAS A TITLE

Usually when you write a paragraph, you give it a title. The title is centered two lines above the beginning of the paragraph, like this:

When writing a title in English, we must remember:

1. A title tells the general idea of the paragraph in a short phrase, not in a sentence. For example, if we write a paragraph about a time when we felt very scared a good title could be:

   A Frightening Experience

   This title is good because it tells the general theme the paragraph will discuss, and it is not a sentence.

2. The first letter of each word in the title is capitalized. Small words like in, out, of, a, the, my are not capitalized unless they are the first or last words of the title. The following are examples of titles with correct capitalization.

   My Favorite Person
   The Best Way to Spend a Sunday Afternoon
   A Funny Family Memory
3. When you write your own title:
   a. do not put quotation marks around it

   INCORRECT: "A Frightening Experience"

   Correct: A Frightening Experience

Exercise B

Look at the following titles. Decide whether they are correct (C) or incorrect (I). If they are incorrect, rewrite them correctly on the line below them.

___ 1. "A day at the beach."

____________________________________________________________________

___ 2. A HAPPY TIME

____________________________________________________________________

___ 3. the happiest day of my life

____________________________________________________________________

___ 4. My favorite room

____________________________________________________________________

___ 5. Sonia's Daily Activities

____________________________________________________________________

___ 6. My Last Vacation

____________________________________________________________________
7. A Beautiful Sight
8. "Some funny Experiences"

9. My Daughter is Wonderful

10. "My First Boyfriend"
WHAT A PARAGRAPH IS: ITS PARTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

A paragraph is composed of a group of sentences that talk about a main or central idea. All of the sentences support this main idea. A paragraph has three important parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

**TOPIC SENTENCE:** tells the main idea of the paragraph.

**SUPPORTING SENTENCES:** describe or explain all the things that make the statement of the topic sentence true.

**CONCLUDING SENTENCE:** signals the end of the paragraph.

**EXERCISE C**

Answer the following questions.

1. How many parts does a paragraph have? ________________________

2. List the parts of a paragraph and tell what the function of each part is.

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
TOPIC SENTENCE

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. It tells what the paragraph will talk about. In other words, it tells what the focus of the paragraph will be. For example, if we are going to write a paragraph about a frightening experience, the following would be good topic sentences.

EXAMPLES:

1. When I was a little girl, my sister and I had a frightening experience.

   This topic sentence tells us that the paragraph will talk about a moment when the writer and her sister were scared.

2. I had a frightening experience when I went to the doctor for a check-up.

   This topic sentence tells us that the paragraph will talk about
   a) what happened at the doctor's.
   b) how it was scary.

3. The most frightening experience of my life happened when I almost crashed into a truck.

   This topic sentence tells us that the paragraph will talk about how the writer almost crashed into a truck and how that was frightening.

Notice that all of the sentences above tell what the paragraph is going to concentrate on.
EXERCISE D

Decide whether each of the following paragraphs has a topic sentence. If it does, underline the topic sentence. If it doesn't, simply put an NT (no topic sentence) on the line to the left of the paragraph.

_____ It was very dark. Two men were slowly walking through the woods. There was snow on the ground and the wind was cold. They noticed a light through the trees and soon saw a cabin. They knocked on the door of the cabin, and an old man answered. He immediately asked them to come in. He seemed a little strange, but he was kind and offered them hot soup and bread. The men stayed in the cabin until morning. Then, the old man led them to the nearest town. He would not accept any money for his help.

_____ Eating lunch is one of my favorite pastimes. Because lunch comes in the middle of the day, it gives me a welcome break from studying. During the weekdays at school, lunch means thirty minutes out of class and a chance to rest after the morning's work. While eating, I can plan what I'm going to do in the afternoon. On the weekend, I spend lunch time with my family. We talk about the week, and we make plans for the rest of the day. In addition to all this, lunch is always a good meal. I enjoy this time of my day very much; that's why it's my favorite past time.

_____ Last weekend I flew for the first time in my life, and it was a strange experience. I felt a little sick at first, and I thought I would have to throw up. However, after a few minutes in the air, I began to feel better. The stewardesses came around to my seat and offered me something to drink. I had hot tea. Then, I reclined my seat and slept for the best of the trip. When I arrived at the airport, a friend asked, "How was the trip, Ernest?" I answered, "I don't really know: I slept through it."

_____ My friend Victoria likes to eat a lot. Last weekend I went out with her to a restaurant for lunch. We each
had a big meal. We ate steak, rice, and vegetables. We also had some wine. The waiter brought bread to our table three times during the meal. Then, for dessert, we ordered the biggest glass of chocolate mousse that the restaurant served. We ate and talked for several hours. At the end of the meal, we ordered some coffee and planned to see each other again. Finally, I got up and told Victoria that I thought we should leave. We had been eating for ____________ hours. She looked at me in a surprised way and said. "We leave now; it's almost time for dinner."
My cousin Stanley is not very mechanically inclined. The other night while he was driving along a dark highway, he got a flat tire. He did not know how to change the tire and began to wave at cars passing by to come help him. Finally, a well-dressed woman stopped and offered him her spare tire. Before he could explain that he did not know how to change the tire, she began to work. Soon, he was ready to go. Another time, the mechanic at the garage where he takes his car told him that he had to check the oil. Stanley did not know where to look and stared at the mechanic blankly. Still another time, he ran out of water for the windshield wipers and did not know where to look to add the water he needed. Stanley has a lot to learn about cars.

EXERCISE E

Decide whether the following groups of words are topic sentences or not. Put a check on the blank if they are topic sentences. Put an NT (not a topic sentence) if they are not. Remember that a topic sentence must be a complete sentence with a subject and a predicate.

1. Ana Maria is one of my good friends.
2. Going to a party can be fun if you know how to have a good time.
3. Bruno eats every day.
4. My mother is a great cook and a great dessert-maker.
5. A good place to visit in the summertime.
6. Tuesday night was the strangest night of my life.
7. Our vacation in Lima, Peru was informative and exciting.
8. In Miami, the weather hot most of the time.
9. Living alone is liberating.

10. My sister's incredible, surprising, and comical wedding.
EXERCISE F

Write a topic sentence about a frightening experience of your own. Then, tell what the paragraph will talk about according to what you stated in the topic sentence.

TOPIC: ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

SENTENCE: ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

WHAT THE PARAGRAPH WILL TALK ABOUT:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

EXERCISE G

Write a topic sentence for each of the following themes. Include key words from the theme in your topic sentence.

1. Describe a happy family memory.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2. Tell about a time you felt depressed.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

3. Write about your favorite possession.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
4. Describe your favorite room.

5. Write about something that makes you angry.

WORKSHEET #5

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

The supporting sentences compose the body of a paragraph. They support what the topic sentence says by giving:
- examples
- reasons
- details
- explanations
- facts

There should be at least three supporting sentences in the body of the paragraph. In these supporting sentences, we give specific information. For example, let's suppose that we are going to write a paragraph about a frightening experience, and that the topic sentence for this paragraph is:

When I was a little girl, my sister and I had a frightening experience.

The supporting sentences for a topic sentence like this one would have to give specific details. They would have to tell what happened to the writer and her sister that caused them to have a frightening experience. Let's suppose that the writer was referring to experiencing an earthquake. Perhaps she would
tell about some of the following things:

-the furniture in the room started to shake
-we couldn't walk
-we fell down
-the vase on the coffee table fell on the floor and broke
-we cried
-we were alone in the house
-we were playing in the living room when it happened
-we didn't know what was happening
-we realized it was an earthquake

All of the above sentences provide specific details about the frightening experience. They support what the topic sentence states.
EXERCISE H

The following exercise lists a group of supporting ideas for the topic sentence given. Decide whether all of the supporting ideas should be included in the paragraph. Cross out those that should not be included.

1. Chantal always has a busy day.
   ___ picks up the kids from school at 2 p.m.
   ___ goes to English classes from 9:25 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
   ___ prepares dinner for the family
   ___ makes the beds
   ___ works part-time at an office
   ___ eats lunch in the cafeteria
   ___ takes the kids to school at 8 a.m.
   ___ enjoys watching TV at night
   ___ has fun on the weekend

2. My room is relaxing and quiet.
   ___ decorated in light shades of beige and green
   ___ loud rock music can be heard in it
   ___ very clear, has a big window
   ___ a stereo to listen to soft music
   ___ a giant poster of red racing cars
   ___ a lot of people are always there
   ___ organized and clean

3. Visiting Mexico City is the best way to spend a vacation.
   ___ visit many historical sites
   ___ go to the anthropological museum
   ___ see the folkloric ballet show
   ___ walk along the Paseo de la Reforma
   ___ eat at great typical restaurants
   ___ enjoy being in a place very different from the U.S.

4. Learning to drive a car can be stressful.
   ___ my husband feels stress
   ___ a lot of other drivers in a hurry
   ___ remember to use the indicator
   ___ go to work early in the morning
   ___ don't have control of the steering wheel
   ___ think that I will crash
   ___ think that I will go off the road
5. Teaching is the best career for me.
   ___ work with people
   ___ help people
   ___ have individual contact with people
   ___ talk about a subject that is interesting to me
   ___ have many vacation periods in the year
   ___ the students buy books
   ___ learn from students
   ___ feel happy

EXERCISE I

Put the following sentences in correct order and paragraph form. Remember that the first sentence of any paragraph is the topic sentence and that the supporting sentences give reasons, facts, examples, details, and explanations that show that what the topic sentence says is true. After you have ordered the sentences, write them in paragraph form on the space provided.

1. ___ This type of stereo is one of the best.
   ___ The seats are comfortable.
   ___ They are covered with white leather.
   ___ The car has big racing wheels.
   ___ My favorite possession is my car.
   ___ Inside, it has a Fischer stereo.
   ___ All in all, I think my car is the best possession I have.
   ___ It is a beautiful red camaro.
   ___ When I go on a date, the women always make a comment about my white leather seats.
2. ___ In the late afternoon, I watch TV.
   ___ For all these reasons, Sunday is the best day of my week.
   ___ I can wake up late.
   ___ I sometimes go to the beach in the early afternoon.
   ___ In the evening I like to prepare my clothes for work and finish up my homework.
   ___ Then, I go to bed feeling happy and relaxed.
___ Sunday is my favorite day of the week.
___ On Sundays I have time to have lunch in my house, and I can eat it slowly and leisurely.
EXERCISE J

Look at the following paragraphs. Decide whether the sentences of the body actually support the main idea stated in the topic sentence (first sentence). If they do not support the topic sentence, rewrite the paragraph correctly. You may need to add some sentences and take other sentences out.

1. FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

   It is true that Friday, the thirteenth is an unlucky day. The day is cloudy and the birds hide out. My brother hates any month that has a Friday the thirteenth. He doesn't even live in Miami; he lives in New York and still he hates these types of days. I am always sick with a cold or a fever on these Fridays. Everybody is mean to me, and I get really mad about any little thing. My neighbors are different from me. They like Friday the thirteenth. I can't understand why.
When I was a child, I had a lot of fun playing in the park across from my house in Cuba. All the kids in the neighborhood would get together there. The lady in charge of keeping the park clean was very old, and her back was curved. She would walk around slowly and leisurely. There were swings in the center of the park, and they were pretty new. The kids played on them. At night everybody went and sat on the benches and talked about what had happened that day. Some of the kids played hopscotch then, they also ran around after each other. Parks are such nice places for children; however, my grandmother didn't think so. She was always telling me to stop running around and to come home. The kids laughed at her because she always screamed at us to be quiet. The park was a nice place for me.
WORKSHEET #5

3. MY FAVORITE ROCK STAR

My favorite rock star is Billy Joel. I like Billy because his music makes me happy. I want to dance to it or sing along with it. The words to his songs are very meaningful because they tell about feelings that everyone has experienced at one time or another. The song "The Angry Young Man" tells about anger. "Only the Good Die Young" tells about social rules that seem to be dumb. Billy Joel has even written and sung a song about Vietnam. When he is on stage, he has a lot of energy. The audience goes crazy listening to him. I really admire Billy Joel, my favorite rock star.
WORKSHEET #5

Look at the following topic sentences. Then, make a list of supporting ideas for the topic sentences.

1. My friend Marco is a funny person.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

2. The most exciting day of my life was the day I graduated from high school.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

3. Cleaning a car is very hard work.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________


CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The concluding sentence of a paragraph tells the reader that the paragraph has ended. Usually a concluding sentence states the main idea of the paragraph again. It is the last sentence of the paragraph.

For instance, in the paragraph we discussed earlier about a frightening experience, a good conclusion could be:

I will be afraid of earthquakes for the rest of my life.

This sentence states the main idea of the paragraph again by referring to being afraid. It also relates to the main idea of the paragraph because it states what made the writer afraid: the earthquake. This sentence is also a signal that the paragraph is finished.

Some writers use expressions like the following in their concluding sentences:

- in sum
- in summary
- in conclusion
- to conclude

In such a case, the concluding sentence about the paragraph which describes a frightening experience could be:

In conclusion, I will be afraid of earthquakes for the rest of my life.

EXERCISE L

Look at the following paragraph and describe whether the concluding sentence for each one is correct. If you do not think it is correct, rewrite it correctly in the space below the paragraph.
1. A bus driver has to be a patient person. All day, he has to answer the same questions over and over. Sometimes, the passengers are rude and nasty to the bus driver. However, the driver cannot get angry. He also has to drive through heavy traffic. The driver has to be careful when he makes a turn. Because the bus is long, he needs extra space on the road when turning. Despite all the questions, traffic, and difficult turns, the bus driver has to cover his route on schedule. A bus driver must truly be a calm and patient person.

2. The Venus fly-trap is an interesting plant. If an insect irritates a hair of the Venus fly-trap just once, no change takes place. However, if within sixty seconds another shock is applied, the leaves of the plant shut quickly. This is an example of a plant that needs two shocks to make the leaves shut. In conclusion, it's nice to know these things.

3. Baby-sitting with my little brother is no fun. Just as I settle down to read or watch television, he asks me to play with him. If I get a telephone call, he screams or knocks something over. I always have to hang up to find out what's wrong with him. He does not let me eat a snack in peace. Usually, he wants half of whatever I have to
eat. Then, when he finally becomes tired, it takes about an hour for him to fall asleep. Anyway, I still love him.
WORKSHEET #7

REVIEW CHART

In this module, we have looked at the different parts of a paragraph. The following chart summarizes what we have studied.

**THE PARAGRAPH**

**FORM:**
- Indent the first line
- Other lines go to the margin

**TITLE:**
- Not a complete sentence
- Tells general idea of paragraph
- First letter of each word is capitalized
- Not underlined
- Not in quotation marks

**TOPIC SENTENCE:**
- Main idea
- One complete sentence with a subject and predicate

**SUPPORTING SENTENCES:**
- Examples
- Details
- Explanation
- Facts
- Reasons

**CONCLUDING SENTENCES:**
- Restates main idea
- Signifies the end of a paragraph
E. Organize the following ideas into a paragraph. Make sure that you include a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. You may have to add your own ideas and take some ideas out of the following list. Write the paragraph list. Write the paragraph on the lines provided.

- give more things to my family
- know a lot about a field
- professional
- learn about many different areas of study
- an education is important
- make more money
- get confidence in myself

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
A. What does a paragraph look like?

B. The first line of a paragraph must be ____________________.

C. List 2 things a title should have.
   1. ___________________________________________________________
   2. ___________________________________________________________

D. What are the parts of a paragraph?
V. PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the following topics and write a paragraph about it.

A. Describe a happy family memory.
B. Describe the supermarket where you shop.
C. Tell about your favorite movie star, person, or relative.
D. Tell what your favorite month of the year is and explain why.