

WRITING A SINGLE PARAGRAPH



Purpose: This packet instructs students in writing a single paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting detail sentences, and a concluding sentence.

After completing this packet, students should be able to identify parts of a paragraph, pass the Comprehension Check with 70% or above, and write a single paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details, and conclusion.

Time/Process: This packet should take 1-3 hours to complete. The completed packet should be returned to the faculty member who assigned it.

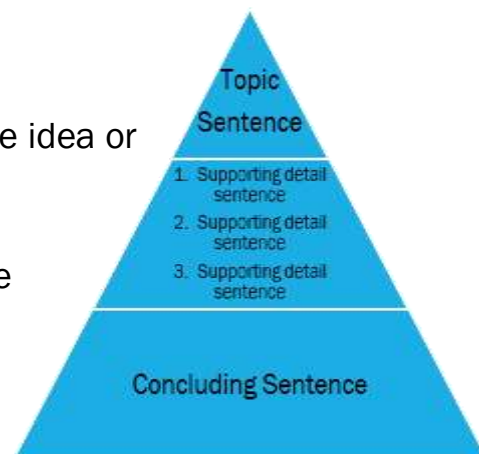
Materials: Packet, pen/pencil

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of related sentences about one idea or subject. This packet concentrates on the basic paragraph organization which has at least five sentences. A basic paragraph begins with a topic sentence. The topic sentence introduces the subject and an idea about that subject. The topic sentence states the point, or main idea, and sets up the organization of the paragraph.

Next, a paragraph has several sentences that support the point of the topic through details and evidence, such as examples or statistics. Finally, the paragraph ends with a concluding sentence. The concluding sentence sums up the point proven by the supporting details. It helps the reader know the importance of the point.

You can see from the “Paragraph Pyramid” that there are **three necessary parts** to a basic paragraph: **(1) topic sentence, (2) several supporting sentences, and (3) concluding sentence.**



I. A paragraph, like a story, needs a beginning, middle, and end.

- In a paragraph, the beginning is the topic sentence; the middle is the details that support the topic sentence; the end of the paragraph is the conclusion.
- As with a story, if information is missing from the beginning, the middle, or the end, the reader will not understand the paragraph or the story.

Example: The Story of Cinderella

- **In the beginning:** Cinderella, dressed in rags, is sweeping out the fireplace. Her abusive step-mother and step-sisters are getting ready to go to the Prince's ball.
- **In the middle:** After the step-mother and step-sisters leave for the ball, Cinderella's "Fairy God Mother" appears and magically gets Cinderella into beautiful clothes and off to the ball where she dances with the prince. Cinderella must be home by midnight, and in her hurry, she loses one shoe, a glass slipper.
- **In the end:** The prince searches for the woman who can fit into the glass slipper. Cinderella tries it on. The prince takes her away, and they "live happily ever after."

If we did not know that Cinderella lived with an abusive step-mother and step-sisters, we would be confused about why she was wearing rags while her step-sisters wore fancy clothing.

If we did not know that Cinderella secretly went to the party and met the prince, we would wonder and lived "happily ever after," we would wonder what happened.

A paragraph must have a topic sentence, supporting details, and a conclusion, or, like a mixed-up fairy tale, it will not make sense.

II. Point and Support

Second, it is important to understand the relationship between a POINT and SUPPORT.

- ✓ A POINT is an idea about the subject or topic of the paragraph.
- ✓ SUPPORT is the evidence that upholds, or proves, the POINT.

Writing is a conversation between the writer and the reader. Look at the conversation below to see the importance of the POINT and SUPPORT relationship.

Conversation #1

You see a group of your friends you have not seen lately. Everyone is talking about their future plans. A friend says: "Hey, you should get an associate's degree from MiraCosta College. It is a good idea."

- Do you agree with your friends that you should spend time and money earning an associate's degree?

- Would your friends be more convincing if they gave you solid reasons why you should get an associate's degree from MiraCosta College?

Conversation #2

Your friend says, "Hey, you should go to MiraCosta College and get an associate's degree. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, an associates degree will qualify you to become an air traffic controller, a radiation therapist, or a nuclear technician without any more than two years of college. These jobs pay between \$ 80,000 and \$125,000 a year. With an associate's degree, you can get on-the-job training for many kinds of careers without having to get a four year degree."

- Which conversation is more convincing to you?
- What are the problems with the first conversation?

In Conversation #1, the statement is

- **Too general**—there is no specific information, or solid evidence, to support your friend's idea.
- **Too subjective**—based on opinions and feelings, not based on facts.

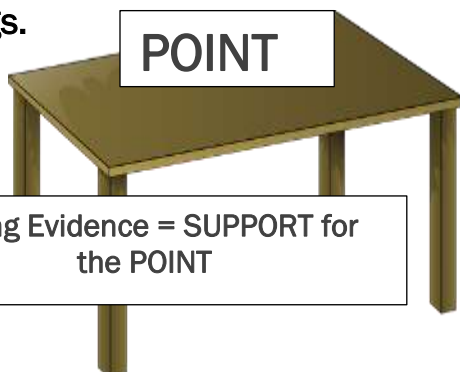
In Conversation #2, the statements are

- **Specific** —There are detailed facts to support your friend's idea.
- **Objective**—The details are based on facts, not opinions or feelings.
- **Supported**—They can be verified on the US Bureau of Labor Statistics website, Office of Occupation Statistics and Employment Projections.

Every paragraph needs a **POINT** and details to **SUPPORT** that point.

- The **POINT** is the main idea.
- The **SUPPORT** is the evidence that proves the main idea.

To visualize the relationship between point and support, think of a table with strong legs.



- The top of the table represents the **POINT**. The table legs represent the **SUPPORTING DETAILS**.
- The **SUPPORT** is evidence, examples, statistics, reasons, facts, and other details that support, or prove, the point.

If there is not enough support—connected evidence and examples—to make logical supporting details, then the point fails, and so does the whole paragraph.

III. What is your POINT?

One of the most challenging parts of writing is coming up with a point that you can defend or argue. Every paragraph must have a point, a purpose. Your point should be a unique and interesting idea. **The point is the main idea of the writing.** It is the message that convinces your readers that you have something worthwhile to say.

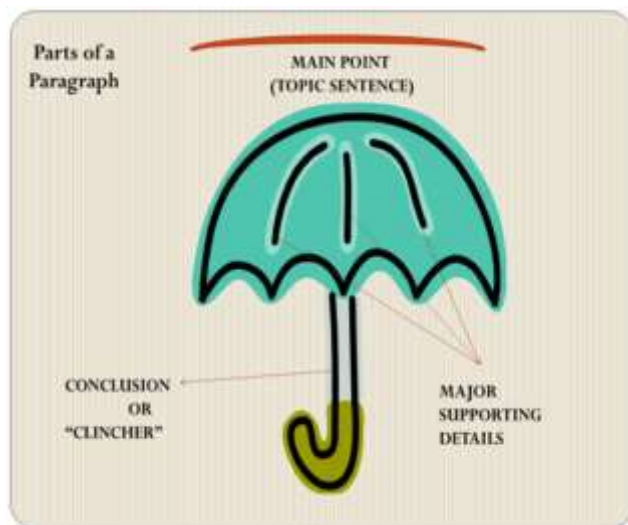
Let's return to the conversations about getting an associate's degree. **The point in conversation #1** is that you should get an associate's degree "because it is a good idea." Without any other support, this point fails.

The point in conversation #2 is that you should get an associate's degree because you can get (1) on-the-job training, (2) a good job, (3) a good salary.

If both conversations became written paragraphs, which paragraph would you want to read?

- Conversation #1 would begin: "You should get an associate's degree because it is a good idea."
- Conversation #2 would begin: You should get an associate's degree because it will help you get a good job, on-the-job training, and a good salary. **This sentence has a point supported by three ideas and would make an interesting paragraph.**

Organization of a Paragraph

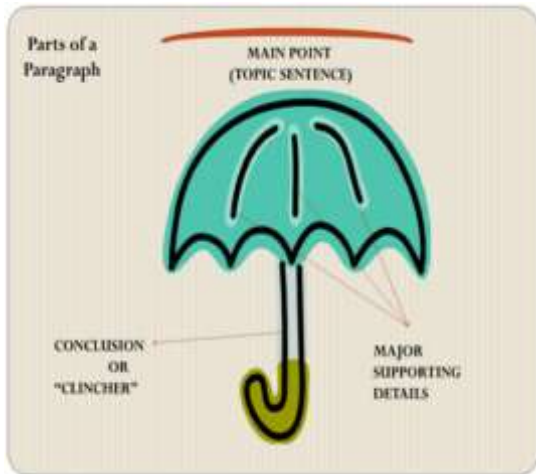


The organization of a paragraph is like an umbrella. Like an open umbrella, the **topic sentence** covers the main idea and everything below it. The topic sentence is general enough to "cover" all of the details. It is specific enough to give the paragraph a focus and an organization.

The "ribs" that hold up the umbrella are the **supporting details**. They are the evidence—examples, facts, statistics—that support the topic sentence. The supporting details prove your point. If the supporting details are clear and logical, your paragraph "holds up." If the supporting details are NOT clear, not logical, or not connected to your topic sentence, your paragraph collapses, like an umbrella that is folded up.

Finally, the handle of the umbrella is the **concluding sentence**. It is what the reader needs "to grab onto" to understand the meaning of the paragraph.

Three Parts of a Paragraph



Part 1: The Topic Sentence

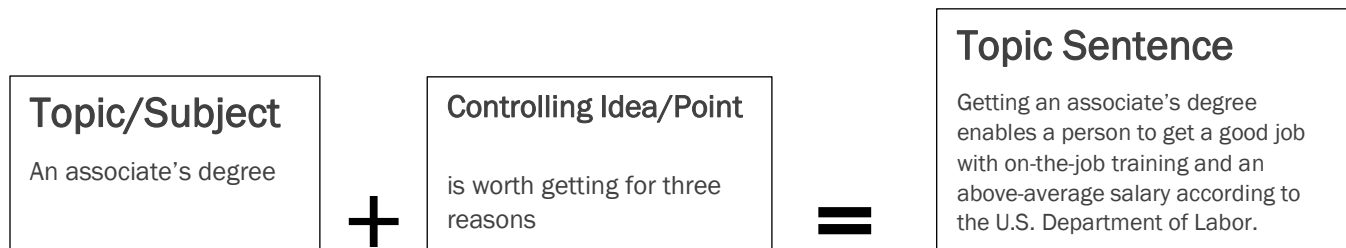
The Topic Sentence is the most important sentence in the paragraph because it introduces the

1. Topic/Subject.
2. Main Idea/Controlling Idea.
3. Organization of the paragraph.

For example, If Conversation #2 was written as a paragraph, it might look like this:

1. Topic/Subject: *Getting an associate's degree*
2. Main Idea/Controlling Idea: *enables you to get a good job with on-the-job training and an above-average salary.*
3. Organization of the Paragraph: Supporting details will show the three reasons why it is important to get an associate's degree. An associate's degree will enable a person to (1) get a good job, (2) get on-the-job training, and (3) get an above-average salary.
4. A topic sentence for a paragraph from Conversation #2 could be something like this: *Getting an associate's degree from MiraCosta College enables one to get a good job with on-the-job training and an above-average salary.*

VII. Topic Sentence Formula



VIII. A Topic Sentence Must Have a Controlling Idea—a position that can be argued. A topic sentence is NOT a fact or a statement. Look at the differences in the following three topic sentences.

- **Topic Sentence #1: A high school diploma may increase your earning power.**
This statement is a fact. Facts do not make good topic sentences because they cannot be argued. They are dead-end topic sentences.
- **Topic Sentence #2: Everyone should get a high school diploma.**
This statement is an opinion. It does **not** have a controlling idea. It is too general to make a point in one paragraph. This is an ineffective topic sentence.
Note: If you add the word “**because**” at the end of this statement, the subject can be narrowed to an appropriate subject for one paragraph.

Example: Everyone should get a high school diploma because _____,
_____, and _____.

- **Topic Sentence #3: The three reasons why I want to get a high school diploma are because I want to improve my employment skills, my self-esteem, and be an example to my children.**
This is a good topic sentence because it is an opinion AND it has a controlling idea that could become three supporting details. It leads to an organizational pattern because there are three reasons why the author wants to get a high school diploma.

Practice 1: Identify the topic and the controlling idea. Underline the topic once. Underline the controlling idea twice.

Example: Talking on the cell phone while driving should be treated as seriously as a DUI.

1. Fathers should be granted leave to stay home with a new baby.
2. Learning to write well takes a lot of practice.
3. My best friend is trustworthy, intelligent, and funny.
4. Worldwide pollution has caused many problems.
5. Losing my job was a good thing because I went back to school and finished my degree.

Practice 2: Identify the best topic sentence. Circle the appropriate letter for the best topic sentence in each group.

1. a. The apartments on Elm Street are a fire hazard.
b. The apartments on Elm Street are such a fire hazard that they should be condemned.

2. a. Snakes do not deserve their bad reputation.
b. Snakes are bad.

3. a. Summer can be unpleasant.
b. Bugs, poison ivy, and allergies make summer unpleasant.

4. a. Decorating an apartment does not have to be expensive.
b. Inexpensive plants, second-hand furniture, and a good cleaning improves apartment décor without spending too much money.

5. a. I used to drive an old blue Datsun B210 Hatchback car.
b. I used to drive an old blue Datsun B210 Hatchback that was unreliable, difficult to drive, and too small for my family.

Topic Sentence Review

In the Practice above, which letter did you circle for number 5?

- “Sentence a” has a topic but no controlling idea. It is a dead-end statement. It would not be the best topic sentence.
- “Sentence b” has a topic and a controlling idea. The Datsun B210 car is the topic. The controlling ideas are that it was unreliable, difficult to drive, and too small. These three ideas can be supported with evidence and examples. The evidence is called “supporting details.”
- Review the example topic sentence formula:



Old Datsun B210	unreliable, difficult to drive, small	My old blue Datsun B210 automobile was unreliable, difficult to drive, and too small for my family.
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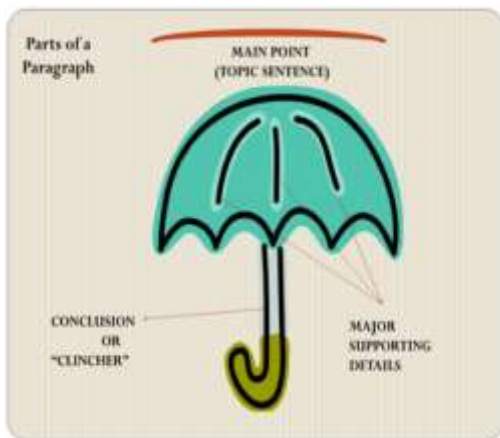
Topic Sentence Hints

If you have trouble writing a topic sentence, think of three reasons why the topic is important and follow this model:

There are three reasons why _____ is important. These reasons are _____, _____, and _____.

- The first blank is the topic (the subject).
- Topics can be anything: personal goals, story characters, arguments for or against any issue
- The next three blanks are the reasons the topic is important.
- This formula is a simple topic sentence, but it will give you a beginning for a paragraph.
- Once you begin writing, you will find it easier to continue writing. After you have written a few sentences, or even the whole paragraph, you may go back and rewrite the topic sentence so that it fits the supporting details you chose.
- This is OK! The writing process is “**planning, writing, re-writing**” over and over again.

[Get more info about topic sentences. Get the *Topic Sentence Directed Learning Packet*.]



Part 2: The Supporting Detail Sentences

Supporting details prove your point **ONLY** if they are related to your point.

If supporting details are not related to your point, your paragraph is off topic. Your reader will **not** know what your point is or what you are trying to communicate.

Example: My old car, a blue Datsun B210, was unreliable, difficult to drive, and too small. The new GMC Yukon has modern technology.

What is wrong with these two sentences being in the same paragraph?

- 1) The second sentence is completely off topic.
- 2) Yes, you are writing about cars, but the controlling idea in the topic sentence is three reasons why the old Datsun B210 was not a good car.

- 3) The new GMC Yukon has nothing to do with the reasons why the old Datsun was not a good car. Your paragraph is not comparing the two automobiles. The paragraph is ONLY about the problems with the Datsun B210.



After each sentence, stop and reread it.

Ask yourself:

- Does this information support the topic sentence?
- Does it directly relate to the topic sentence?

If the sentence is not directly related to the topic sentence, your supporting points are not hitting the target, let alone the bull's eye.

Practice 3: Identify point and support. In each sentence group, write POINT next to the sentence that makes a point. There will be only one point. Write SUPPORT if the sentence supports the point. There may be more than one sentence that supports the point. Write NO if the sentence is off topic and does not belong in the group.

Example

1. **Point** I knew I was getting the flu.
2. **Support** My fever went up to 102 degrees Fahrenheit.
3. **NO** I had a broken arm.
4. **Support** My body ached and my throat hurt.

Group 1

1. _____ A bicyclist was hit there.
2. _____ It is a dangerous intersection.
3. _____ The city needs to put a traffic light at Elm and Spruce Streets.
4. _____ Sometimes drivers ignore the stop sign.

Group 2

1. _____ Chemicals in dark chocolate help prevent heart disease
2. _____ Some say dark chocolate can help fight depression.
3. _____ Dark chocolate is loaded with minerals.
4. _____ Dark chocolate can be good for the human body.

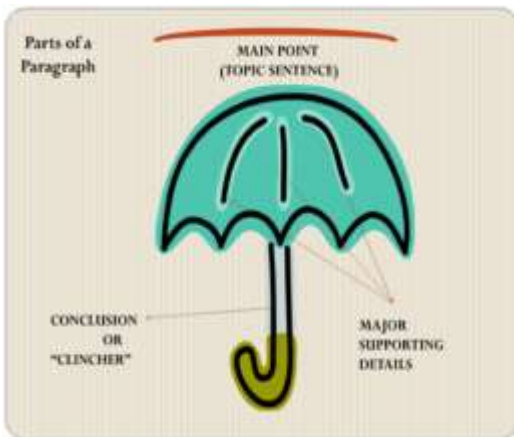
Group 3

1. _____ You are a thousand times more likely to drown than to get bitten by a shark.
2. _____ More people are killed by farm pigs each year than by sharks.
3. _____ It is not true that sharks are dangerous and hunt people.
4. _____ My favorite beach is in Palm Springs.

Group 4

1. _____ The biggest U.S. meat processor will sell its new fake meat patties this year.
2. _____ “Flexitarians” are people who eat meat sometimes but want to add more vegetable protein to their diets.
3. _____ The meat processor wants to get in on the “veggie protein” earnings that have exploded in the U.S. over the last five years.
4. _____ The company wants to appeal to so-called “flexitarians.”

Part 3: The Concluding Sentence



The concluding sentence is sometimes called the “clincher.” The word “clinch” means to settle an argument, an agreement, or to “seal the deal.” The clincher resolves the problems posed in the paragraph. Without a concluding sentence, your paragraph is like a story without an ending.

The concluding sentence:

- resolves questions asked in the beginning
- restates the top

In an argumentative paragraph, the concluding sentence may be “a call to action.” The writer tells the reader what he/she should do to about the issue.

Three Ways to Conclude a Paragraph

1. End with a summary of the information and a final thought.

Examples:

1. “Pets can be hugely helpful to people of all ages who are fighting depression.”
2. “It is clear from the infinite variety of entertainment that New York City is an exciting place.”

2. End with a thought-provoking question about one of these:

- a. why the subject of your paragraph is important
- b. what might happen in the future
- c. what should be done about the subject
- d. which choice should be made

Example:

1. “Can we as a nation afford to be less involved in the practice of science? Can we afford to delegate this important task to other countries?”

3. End with a recommendation.

Examples:

- 1. “Students should have the opportunity to volunteer at places that interest them.”
- 2. “Her book is definitely on my top-ten list. I would recommend it to anyone who loves poetry and music.”

Proofreading

Do not expect to write a good paragraph in one sitting. The writing process includes constant reading and re-reading, as well constant writing and re-writing. Many authors rewrite parts of their novels more than 20 times. The original *Star Wars* movie script was completely rewritten four times. The latest *Star Wars: Episode IX*, (release: December 2019) went through extensive rewrites. The rewrites added two extra months to the filming timeline.

The “Dirty Dozen” Questions

Take time to ask yourself these questions! If the answer is “no” to any question, correct the error and “clean up” your paragraph. Expect to rewrite. It is part of the process.

- 1. Do I have a clear topic sentence?
- 2. Do I have supporting details that “prove” my topic sentence?
- 3. Do I have complete sentences? [NO run-on sentences; NO fragment sentences]
- 4. Does each sentence begin with a capital letter?
- 5. Does each sentence end with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark?
- 6. Do I have any spelling mistakes?
- 7. Did I use the correct word? [Double-check: their, there, they’re; your, you’re; its, it’s]
- 8. Did I indent the first line?
- 9. Do I have a title?
- 10. Did I reread my paragraph several times?
- 11. Did I reread the paragraph out loud?
- 12. Did I communicate my point to my audience/reader?

Never turn in a paragraph without going through these 12 questions!

Common Paragraph Types

1. Argumentative – convinces reader of a certain point of view.
2. Narrative – tells a story or personal event
3. Descriptive – uses five senses to create vivid pictures in the reader’s mind
4. Literary Analysis – uses literary vocabulary to analyze stories, poems, novels

Sample Paragraph: Narrative

Old Blue: An Unreliable Car

¹ When we moved from midwest farm country to the Southern California car culture, I was anxious to buy the first shiny, used car I saw. ² The 1979 Datsun B210 Hatchback was blue with black interior, spotlessly clean inside and out, but **soon we realized that this ten year old car was unreliable, difficult to drive, and too small for the family.** ³ The first few times I drove it, it felt sporty and fun. ⁴ Later the car seemed to have a mind of its own. ⁵ Some days it would start; some days it would not. ⁶ When it did not start, I scrambled to get rides to work. ⁷ On the days it did start, I was overjoyed until I began pulling out of the parking space, and then I realized how difficult it was to drive. ⁸ The stick shift seemed to stick more than it shifted. ⁹ I could barely see out of the back window because of the “cool” black window louvers which blocked my vision of whatever was behind the car. ¹⁰ The backseat was entirely taken up by two kids’ car seats. ¹¹ Our family limped along with this unreliable and difficult car for five years. Then we needed room for three in the already crowded backseat. ¹² **It was time to say good-bye to our unreliable, stubborn, and cramped “friend,” the old blue Datsun B210.**



Figure 1 1979 Datsun B210

Fun Fact: Datsun made its first vehicle in 1914. The Nissan company was bought Datsun in 1934, which makes the Nissan Company over 100 years old. In 1984, Nissan stopped using the Datsun name. Datsun was a made-up name using the three initials of the company’s founders (DAT).

Narrative Paragraph Organization - Sentence by Sentence

- Sentence 1 INTRODUCTION: Subject: 1979 Datsun B210 car.
- Sentence 2 TOPIC SENTENCE: **Three things about the Datsun: unreliable, difficult to drive, too small.**
- Sentence 4/5 1st SUPPORTING DETAIL: The car was unreliable. Example: It had a “mind of its own;” sometimes it started; sometimes it did not start.
- Sentence 7/8/9 2nd SUPPORTING DETAIL: The car was difficult to drive. Example: bad stick shift and difficult to see out the back window.
- Sentence 10/11 3rd SUPPORTING DETAIL: The car was too small. Example: two carseats filled the backseat
- Sentence 12 CONCLUDING SENTENCE: It was time to say good-bye to our unreliable, difficult, small car.

Literary Analysis Paragraph with MLA with Citation

See the sample literary analysis paragraph, “The Impact of the Schoolroom Setting in “Eleven,” typed in MLA format. When writing about literature, use quotes from the text as supporting details.

The words from the text must be in quotation marks with a citation. The citation is the author’s name and page number in parentheses. Note: the citation (Cisneros 19). Also, see that the sentence punctuation goes AFTER the citation. There is no need put “pg.” for page number; simply put the number.

Sample Paragraph: Literary Analysis

Garcia 1

Terry Garcia

Susan Pynes

English 1

September 18, 2021

The Impact of the Schoolroom Setting in “Eleven”

The setting of “Eleven,” by Sandra Cisneros, is Rachel’s fifth-grade classroom. It is important to the action of the story because the setting of a classroom presents conflicts experienced by most of us. First of all, a classroom is a group of peers, and people do not want to be embarrassed in front of their peers. Second, the classroom teacher has all the authority; the students have none, so there is a power imbalance. The setting is in a classroom on Rachel’s eleventh birthday. It is usual to get attention on your birthday, but instead of feeling special, Rachel is embarrassed in front of her classmates because of the negative attention from Mrs. Price when she insists that an old, stretched-out, red sweater belongs to Rachel. Rachel thinks her birthday is ruined because the teacher’s insistence. Mrs. Price will not listen to Rachel’s protests. “Of course, it’s yours,” Mrs. Price says. “I remember you wearing it once.” Then Rachel thinks: “Because she’s old and the teacher, she’s right and I’m not” (Cisneros 19). The humiliation leads Rachel to realize that even though she is a year older, she is not suddenly powerful or mature. She may be eleven, but she still does not know how to deal with the embarrassment in front of her classmates. The humiliation is more than Rachel can take, and she breaks down crying in front of her classmates, which only makes things worse. Even though she is eleven years old, she feels as if she were “two.” The setting is important because it sets up the conflict of the story. Plus, the reader can identify with Rachel’s embarrassment in front of her classmates because of an insensitive teacher.

Practice Paragraph Writing

Choose **one** of the following prompts. Write **one paragraph**. Include a topic sentence, three specific supporting details, and a conclusion.

Prompt #1. Write a paragraph about a goal you have accomplished. Explain the goal and three steps you took to accomplish the goal.

Prompt #2. In one paragraph, explain a challenge that you have overcome. Define the challenge, three reasons it was difficult, and how you overcame the difficulties.

Prompt #3. Write a paragraph about a person who has had a positive influence on your life. Choose three personality traits that you admire about that person. Examples of personality traits are: kindness, strength, honesty, hard-working, unselfishness. The traits you write about are your choice. You do not have to write about any of the examples.

Responding to a Prompt

A “prompt” is a writing assignment. Pay close attention to the exact information the prompt requires from you. In your topic sentence, use words from the prompt.

For example, in prompt 1, it asks you to “explain a **goal and three steps** you used to accomplish it.” You might begin: “I accomplished a **goal** last year when I got my driver’s license. **The three steps** I took to accomplish the goal were.....”

Notice that exact words from the prompt are repeated in the writing. The reader should be able to easily figure out the prompt you are addressing.

COMPREHENSION CHECK (A)

Student Name _____ Date _____

Instructor _____ Score _____/10

Directions: Circle the best answer.

1. The most important sentence in a paragraph is:
 - a. concluding sentence
 - b. supporting detail sentence
 - c. topic sentence
 - d. introductory sentence

2. Which sentence would be the best topic sentence?
 - a. Getting a high school diploma will improve your earning power.
 - b. There are three reasons why you should get your high school diploma.
 - c. It is difficult to get a high school diploma.
 - d. School sucks.

3. The last sentence in a paragraph is known as the clincher because
 - a. It brings things to a close.
 - b. It means "finalize a deal."
 - c. It means settle an argument.
 - d. All of the above

4. It is important to support your point with
 - a. examples
 - b. facts
 - c. credible information
 - d. all of the above

5. A topic sentence consists of
 - a. controlling idea and examples
 - b. topic and controlling idea
 - c. topic and subject
 - d. generalizations

6. A simple way to write a topic sentence is to
 - a. Find three specific reasons the topic is important
 - b. Write three general reasons the topic is important
 - c. Find a good quote
 - d. None of the above

7. A visual reminder of the importance of making a point and supporting with detailed evidence is to think of a
 - a. Four-legged table
 - b. Three-legged stool
 - c. Comfortable couch
 - d. rocking chair

9. All throughout the writing process, you should
 - e. ask questions
 - f. reread the prompt
 - g. read your writing over and over
 - h. All of the above

10. A paragraph is
 - i. A group of related sentences about one topic
 - j. A group of related generalities
 - k. A group of related specifics
 - l. None of the above

COMPREHENSION CHECK (A)

Student Name _____

Date _____






Instructor _____

Score _____/10

EXIT TICKET

This anonymous form will help us improve these packets and better support students. Thank you for completing it.

1. How satisfied were you with this Directed Learning Packet?

 <input type="radio"/> Extremely Unsatisfied	 <input type="radio"/> Unsatisfied	 <input type="radio"/> Neutral	 <input type="radio"/> Satisfied	 <input type="radio"/> Extremely Satisfied
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2. How much time did it take you to complete this packet?

Less than 1 hour <input type="radio"/>	2 – 3 hours <input type="radio"/>	3 – 4 hours <input type="radio"/>	More than 4 hours <input type="radio"/>
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3. How likely are you to recommend this packet to another student?

Extremely unlikely <input type="radio"/>	Unlikely <input type="radio"/>	Neutral <input type="radio"/>	Likely <input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely <input type="radio"/>
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4. How likely are you to refer to/use this packet for future assignments?

Extremely unlikely <input type="radio"/>	Unlikely <input type="radio"/>	Neutral <input type="radio"/>	Likely <input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely <input type="radio"/>
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5. What is one **major take away**, or **one thing you learned** from this packet that you did not know before?

6. Is there another topic that you would like to see covered in a directed learning packet?