

Paragraph Construction



Levels 9-12

General Guidelines

As you have learned in the past, paragraphs have three main parts: the topic sentence, the body, and the conclusion. In the samples on the following pages, the first paragraph is properly done, while the second two paragraphs have mistakes. Please refer to these sample paragraphs as you learn your lesson today.

Topic Sentence

- * The topic sentence is indented when it is the first sentence.
- * Like all sentences, topic sentences begin with a capital letter and end with proper punctuation.
- * The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. Look at the sample paragraphs (“Rainbows,” “Dogs,” and “Fish”) and point out or underline the topic sentence in each one.

Body of the Paragraph

- * The body should include only strong sentences.
- * All sentences should relate to the topic introduced in the first sentence. Look at our sample paragraphs:
 - In the “Rainbows” paragraph, all sentences are interesting thoughts or information about rainbows.
 - In the “Dogs” paragraph, the sentences about the library and Mrs. Jones do not relate to the topic sentence.
- * Each sentence should begin with a capital letter and end with proper punctuation.

Conclusion

- * Restate the topic sentence, only “with a twist.” See our sample, “Rainbows,” for an example of this type of ending. Here, the student returns to the theme of amazement, while adding the role of God into the sentence.
- * Tell the reader what you have said or proven in the paragraph. For instance, “So we see that, though rainbows may look magical, they are only a mixture of sun and water.”
- * Finish the part of the story contained in the paragraph: “When night fell, the princess went to sleep happily.”

Unity

- * Unity is the sense that all the sentences in the paragraph are talking about one topic or subject.
- * Look at our sample paragraphs. Which one has the strongest unity? What makes it strong?
- * Which is the most disunited? Why?
- * Can you edit or rearrange the weaker paragraphs according to the guidelines above so that they become stronger, better, more unified paragraphs?

Sentence Arrangements

Now that you are becoming proficient in paragraph construction, spend some time crafting your sentences carefully. As you have learned in other sections of *Writing Aids*, there is a great deal to understand about sentence construction. The practice and skills you have developed come into play as you attempt to make your paragraphs more interesting. When editing your first drafts for your teacher’s approval, look for the following elements:

- * Are your sentences varied? Do some of them begin with introductory clauses? Are some shorter and some longer? Have you included a rhetorical question to add variety?
- * Is each word in every sentence crafted? Are the words concrete, specific, and accurate?



Self-proofing

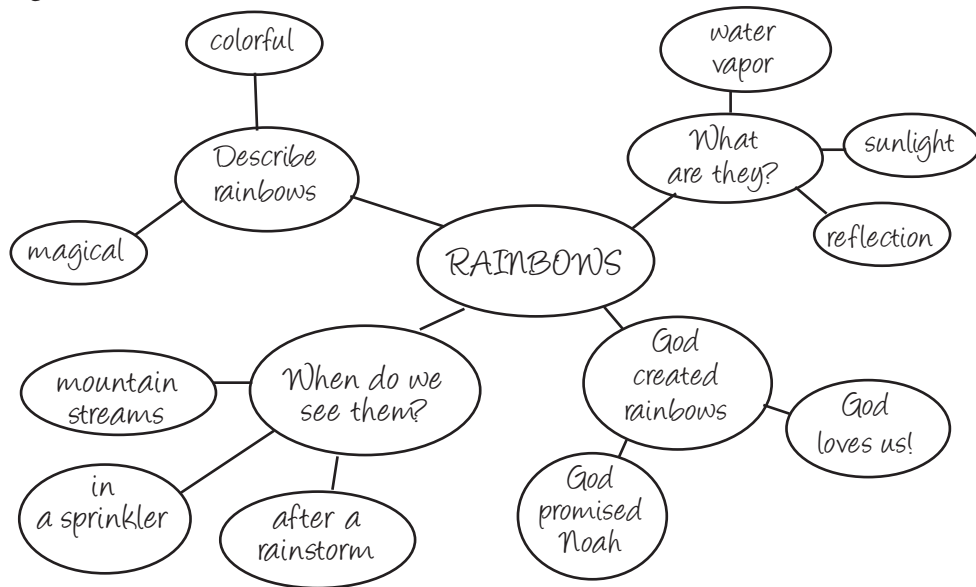
As you focus on writing paragraphs this week, and when you do longer projects that join paragraphs together, be sure to self proof your work before you submit it to your teacher.

- * Check each sentence. Does it relate directly to your topic sentence?
- * Check each sentence for completeness, concrete and specific words, and proper punctuation.
- * If you are writing more than one paragraph, are you joining them together so that your ideas flow logically for the reader?

Sample Paragraph #1

Prewriting:

Notice that some of the ideas that the student recorded in his prewriting do not appear in his paragraph.



Draft:

Rainbows

Rainbows amaze me. Children believe that they are magical, but scientists tell us that they are the result of sunlight refracted by water! When water vapor is present with sunlight, each tiny drop bends the rays such that the human eye sees a spectrum of colors. When can you reliably see a rainbow? One may appear after a rainstorm as the sun shines between parting clouds, in the mist of a sprinkler on a hot, sunny day, or near the waterfall of a mountain stream. God made the first rainbow to reassure Noah of His promise never again to flood the earth. How amazing it is to know that God would arrange the laws of nature to reassure sinners like us of His lovingkindness!

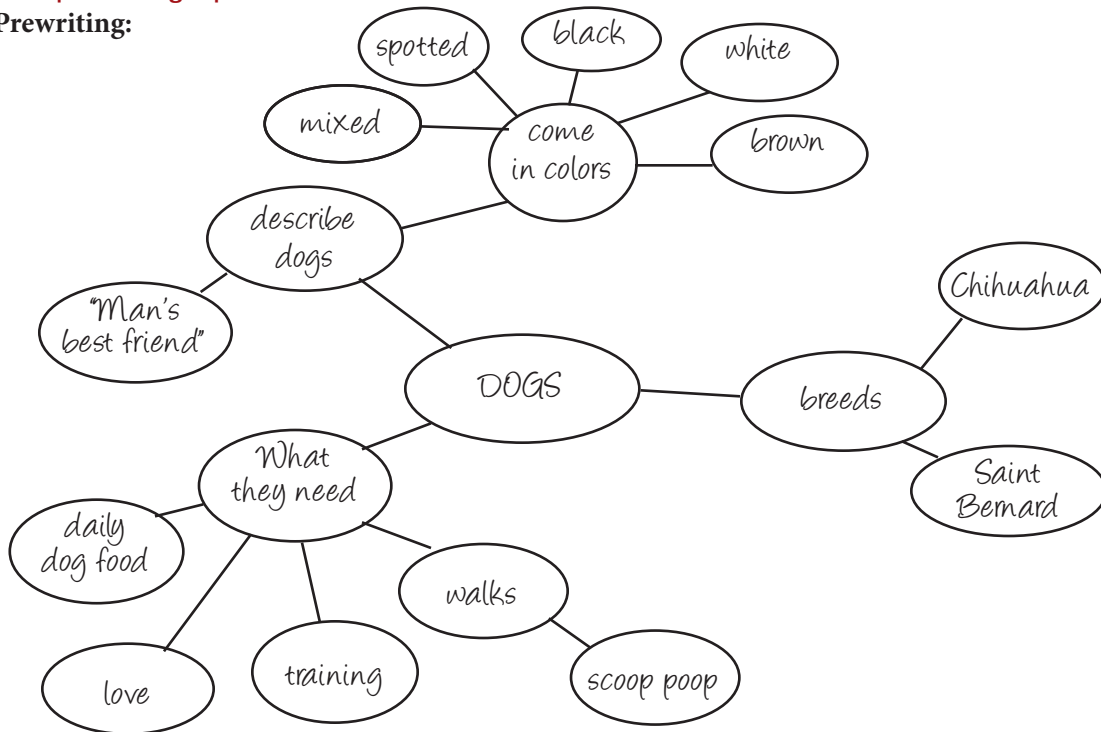
Evaluate:

- * Is the topic sentence effective? Does it give us an indication of what the paragraph is about?
- * How are the sentences? Varied? Interesting?
- * Is there a conclusion that ties back to the start of the paragraph and gives a sense of ending?



Sample Paragraph #2

Prewriting:



Draft:

Dogs

Why are dogs often called “Man’s Best Friend?” Could it be because, as individuals, people are excited about the variety of dogs that there are to choose from? There are various breeds and colors, and more are being developed year by year. From Chihuahuas to Saint Bernards, dogs come in almost every conceivable size and shape. To keep his best friend alive, a dog owner needs to be responsible. He must feed his pet daily and take it for regular walks. If a man buys a puppy, there is a lot of training to do! One can take classes in dog training or read helpful books on this subject. There are excellent resources of this type at the library. If you ask the librarian, named Mrs. Jones, she is quite helpful and knowledgeable about books on training dogs.

Evaluate:

- * Is the topic sentence effective? Does it give us an indication of what the paragraph is about?
- * How are the sentences? Varied? Interesting?
- * Is there a conclusion that ties back to the start of the paragraph and gives a sense of ending?

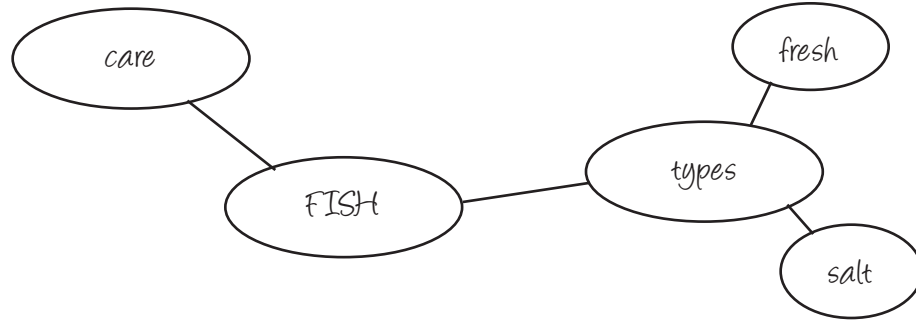


Sample Paragraph #3

Prewriting:

Notice that this student did not spend much time on his prewriting.

The student knows a lot about his topic, so he assumes that he doesn't need to do a thorough job of prewriting and organizing his ideas.



Draft:

Fish

The seas are full of a vast number of salt-water fish, and lakes, ponds, and streams house fresh-water varieties. I have been keeping fresh-water fish for many years. They are really very simple to care for. Each day I feed them, and once a month their tank's filter has to be cleaned. I find fish to be interesting pets, and they are peaceful to watch. I like to keep the fish tank light on at night when I can fall asleep watching them.

Evaluate:

- * Is the topic sentence effective? Does it give us an indication of what the paragraph is about?
- * How are the sentences? Varied? Interesting?
- * Is there a conclusion that ties back to the start of the paragraph and gives a sense of ending?
- * Take this paragraph and the cluster diagram above and edit them to make them stronger. Ask your teacher for her comments on your edits when they are complete!