

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

When writing and assembling your ideas, it is important to structure them in a logical and organised manner. This is done in English using a series of paragraphs.

These study notes focus on the structure of a paragraph, and identifying a good topic sentence.

THE PARAGRAPH

A **paragraph** has a structure. It contains a group of sentences that develops **one main idea** or a **topic**, which is the subject of the paragraph.

There are **three** parts to a paragraph:

- **topic sentence**
- **supporting sentences +**
- **developing sentences**
- **(concluding sentence)**

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

The topic sentence, which is the most general statement, communicates the subject of the paragraph. It is usually the first sentence of the paragraph, and the most important, because it controls the ideas in the sentences that follow.

A good topic sentence contains the **topic** of the paragraph, and an idea, opinion or attitude about the topic. The idea, opinion or attitude is called the **controlling idea** because it limits the topic to a specific subject that will be developed in the paragraph.

For example:

Small cars are economical to maintain.
topic *controlling idea*

When writing a topic sentence, it is important that the topic sentence is not too narrow or too broad. For example,

Small cars use less fuel.

This statement is **too narrow** to develop into a paragraph because it restricts the discussion to fuel alone.

Small cars are excellent.

This statement is **too broad** to develop into a single paragraph because it is vague and could focus on many different subject areas.

STUDY TIPS

In the Reading module of the IELTS Test, it is important to identify the topic sentences in order to get a better understanding of the reading passages. This is helpful when scanning a passage for **general or specific information** because it can pinpoint on which paragraph to focus for answers.

The topic sentence is usually the **first sentence of the paragraph**, especially in composing essays. This, however, is not fixed. If the topic sentence is not the first sentence of the paragraph, check the **second and last sentences** of the paragraph.

Remember when **matching paragraphs with headings** in the Reading test, a heading is similar to a topic sentence.