English for Academic Purposes

Guide to Icons:

Discussion Activity

Writing Activity

Editing Tip

Good Example: Reader/writer communication

Bad Example: Reader/writer communication

Vocabulary Builder

Detour to Vocabulary Building

Unit 1:

Constructing Paragraphs in Academic Writing

DISCUSSION

What is a good paragraph?

Look at the picture above; what is the message?

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph. This first sentence is very important because it acts like a road sign to help the reader understand what is happening in the paper and where the writer is taking them in the next paragraph. If there is no topic sentence or the topic sentence does not fit the topic of the paragraph, the reader may become confused and be unable to follow the writer's ideas.

The topic sentence announces and limits the information that will be presented in that paragraph. It does this by containing two important pieces of information: the subject of the paragraph and the aspect of that subject that will be discussed (sometimes called the *topic* and the *controlling idea*). Consider the following example topic sentence.

In order for a research paper to be published, it must be formatted properly.

From this topic sentence, we can see that the subject is a *research paper* and that the aspect of research papers that will be discussed in this paragraph is *formatting*. A topic sentence such as this makes it clear to the reader that the paragraph will deal with formatting research papers; it is an effective road sign. The writer must ensure that the paragraph only deals with the topic of formatting and does not include any other aspects of a research paper; for example, citation practices, editing for grammar mistakes and spelling errors, and so on. In this way, the topic sentence announces and limits the topic of a paragraph.

Look at the following paragraph. Identify the subject of the paragraph and the aspect being discussed (controlling idea). Then, create an appropriate topic sentence.

_____

_____

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_____

_____. Slovenia, for example, was ranked highest in 2013 in the Gender Equality Index (GEI, United Nations Development Program, 2014). In the same year, the percentage of seats in parliament held by women in Slovenia was 24.6%. However, Senegal, which is ranked 119th on the GEI, had 42.7% of parliamentary seats held by women. Other countries with high female participation in politics (FPP) but low ranking on the GEI include Tanzania (FPP=36.6, GEI=124), Zimbabwe (FBB=35.1, GEI=110), and Mozambique (FPP=39.2, GEI=146). It would appear, therefore, that getting more women into politics is not a panacea for gender inequality.

Topic Sentence

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ORGANIZING PARAGRAPHS
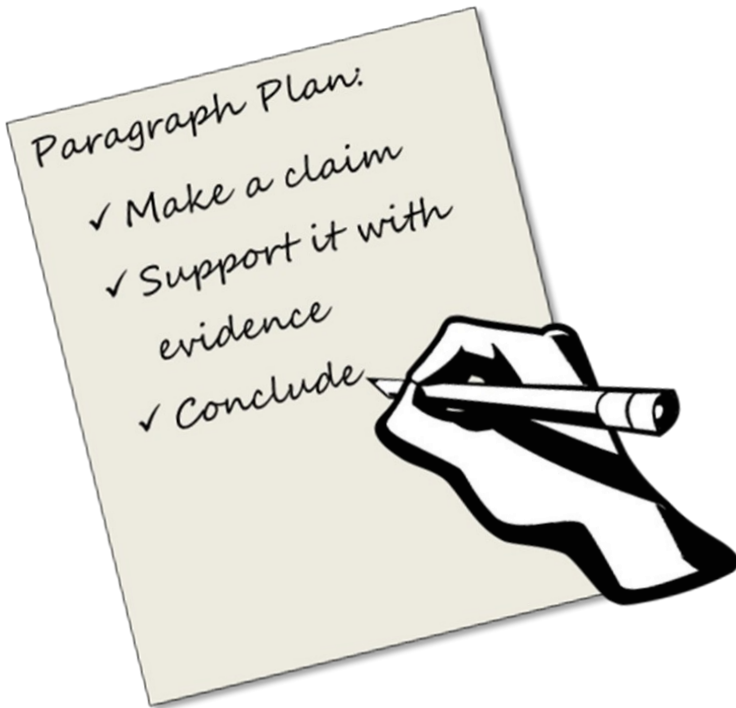
PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE:

CLAIM & SUPPORT

The paragraph in *Topic Sentences: Activity 1* is an example of a typically organized paragraph in academic writing. This paragraph introduces a claim in the topic sentence, provides evidence to support this claim, and finishes with a concluding sentence.

Topic sentence	[Your topic sentence]
Evidence/examples	Data for Slovenia, Senegal, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique
Concluding sentence	"It would appear that getting more women into politics is not a panacea for gender inequality."

Look at the data in Table 1.

Step 1: Analyze the data and come up with a claim that can be supported by the data in the table.

Step 2: Then, write a paragraph following the example in *Topic Sentences: Activity 1* (i.e., claim, evidence, concluding sentence). You may notice several patterns; however, you need only write about one.

Table 1

Female Education, Labor Force Participation, and GEI Rank

Country	% of female population with at least some secondary education (aged 25 or above)	Labor force participation rate (%, aged 15 or above)	GEI rank
Tanzania	5.6	88.1	124
Burundi	5.2	83.2	104
Burkina Faso	0.9	77.1	133
Iran	62.2	23.4	109
Jordan	69.5	15.3	101
Luxembourg	100	50.7	29
Germany	97	53.5	3
Norway	97.4	61.5	9
Slovenia	95.8	52.3	1

Note. Data taken from the Gender Equality Index (GEI, United Nations Development Program, 2014).

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: LOGICAL FLOW

If you have sufficient supporting information, it is possible to make a claim and support it in paragraphs like the one we practiced in *Organizing Paragraphs: Activity 1.* However, this is not the only way that we can organize a paragraph in academic writing. Another way of organizing information is called *logical flow*. Consider the following group of sentences:
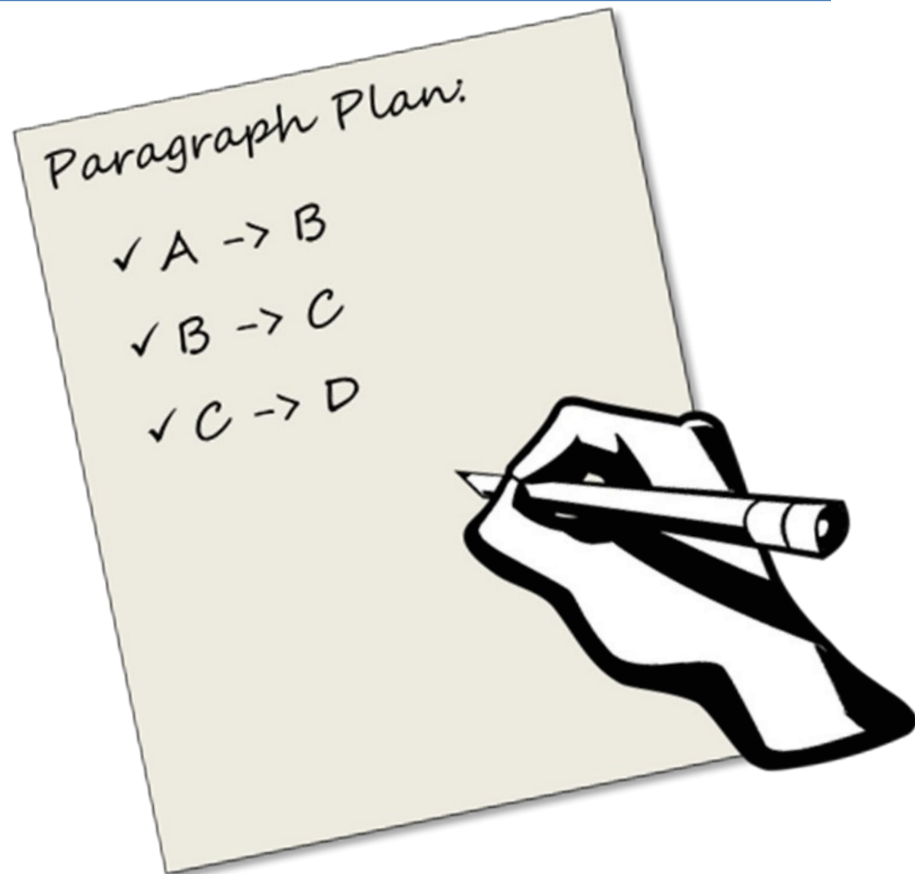
> Companies claim that artificial hiring and promotion protocols erode their competitive edge. Efforts by the government to introduce policies concerning equal-opportunity employment are often met with resistance. Claims such as these have sometimes led to government policies being revised significantly and ultimately having little impact on the status quo of unequal-opportunity employment. This resistance most often comes from larger companies, especially those involved in more competitive industries.

Although the sentences in this paragraph are grammatical and the meaning of this paragraph is not impossible to understand, the information is badly organized and may be confusing for a reader. In the paragraph below, sections that make reference to companies are marked A; sections that make reference to the government are marked B. Notice how the paragraph hops from one topic to the other and back again.

(A) Companies claim that artificial hiring and promotion protocols erode their competitive edge. (B) Efforts by the government to introduce policies concerning equal-opportunity employment are often met with resistance. Claims such as these have sometimes led to government policies being revised significantly and ultimately having little impact on the status quo of unequal-opportunity employment. (A) This resistance most often comes from larger companies, especially those involved in more competitive industries.

In order for a paragraph to flow logically, each sentence should end by introducing the topic of the next sentence (as much as is possible). Look again at the first sentence of the paragraph above. As the topic sentence, it introduces company claims, artificial protocols, and eroding competitive edge as the topic of the paragraph; however, the next sentence jumps to a new subject (the government—not companies) and a related but not identical term (equal opportunity employment—not artificial promotion protocols and completely different from eroding competition). The link between these two topics may not be clear to the reader and may cause confusion as to the topic of the paragraph. Next, the paragraph returns to the topic of companies and then back to the government. Finally the paragraph returns once again to companies. The information in this paragraph does not flow logically and this may confuse a reader.

A more logical organization of the information would flow like this:

⇒ Government policies – meet with resistance

⇒ Resistance – from companies

⇒ Companies – claims about competitive edge

⇒ Claims – government revision of policies

Here is the paragraph reorganized according to the new plan.

B Efforts by the government to introduce policies concerning equal-opportunity employment have often been met with <u>resistance</u>. **A** This <u>resistance</u> most often comes from larger <u>companies</u>, especially those involved in more competitive industries. These <u>companies</u> <u>claim</u> that artificial hiring and promotion protocols would erode their competitive edge. <u>Claims</u> such as these **B** have sometimes led to <u>government policies being revised</u> significantly and ultimately having little impact on the status quo of unequal-opportunity employment.

In the above paragraph, the first sentence introduces the topic as government policies and the resistance to them. This is the actual topic of the paragraph. At the end of the topic sentence, the word "resistance" appears (underlined above). This word is repeated at the beginning of the next sentence. This allows the reader to see the logical connection between the two sentences. Look at the other underlined words in the paragraph. Notice how the key point from the previous sentence is repeated in the next. This is called logical flow.

Look at the paragraph below. The topic sentence is correct; however, the other sentences have been mixed up. Try to organize the sentences so that the information flows logically.

Subsidizing energy costs is a common strategy in many countries to encourage economic growth. Increases in profits lead to higher tax contributions—which offset the cost of the original energy subsidies. However, recent research has called into question whether these subsidies are actually generating the economic growth for which they are designed. One way this economic growth is achieved is by reducing the energy costs of private sector companies, thus increasing profit margins and allowing for more investment back into the company. This investment should lead to increased sales and profits.

Subsidizing energy costs is a common strategy in many countries to

encourage economic growth..

You have recently finished researching the relationship between decentralization and corruption. Below are the notes you have taken on this relationship. Complete the following tasks.

1. Read the notes below and analyse (compare and contrast findings) the research in the table on the following page.
2. Decide how many paragraphs could be written based on this research.
3. Write at least one of these paragraphs with a clear topic sentence that explains the topic in a logical flow.

Loman (2011)

Believes centralized government is too disconnected – distance from source of corruption leads to only occasional audits being conducted (because the government has too many departments to check and not enough time to travel long distances); Claims that audits performed by local inspectors would be performed more often and would, therefore, be more likely to detect corruption.

Jerry & Ben (2012)

Through interviews with local government staff, J & B noted resistance to inspectors from central government – local government workers view them as outsiders; local government staff members are more cooperative with local inspectors because they are part of the same group. Therefore this cooperation leads to higher quality audits (i.e., more efficient at detecting corruption).

Glengarry (2009)

Showed statistically that the greater the distance between the central government facilities and the local government, the less frequent the audits of local governments. Also found that the number of audits was negatively associated with perceived corruption in local governments.

	Audits: Frequency	Audits: Quality		
Loman (2011)	Greater distance leads to fewer audits because of travelling time Local auditors would perform more frequent audits	Local auditors would perform better audits—but does not elaborate on the relationship between frequency and quality		
Jerry & Ben (2012)				
Glengarry (2009)				

Plan in this shaded area:

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EDITING TIPS

When writing a paragraph that flows logically, you may feel that repeating the same words is not good writing because it may annoy the reader. Look at this example:

> In order to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand into other regions, <u>an opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector</u> is needed. <u>An opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector</u> can be achieved through an outreach program <u>implemented</u> at the local level.

Although these sentences do flow logically, the repetition of "an opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector" may frustrate a reader. A strategy commonly used in the editing stage to alleviate this frustration is to use the pronoun *this*; however, this strategy may lead to confusion as to what subject *this* refers to in the previous sentence. Look at this example:

> In order to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand into other regions, <u>an opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector</u> is needed. <u>This</u> can be achieved through an outreach program implemented at the local level.

The reader may wonder if "this" refers to

⇒   An opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector or

⇒   small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) expanding into other regions.

To make it clear to the reader what "this" refers to, the writer should add a key word after *this.* Look at the following example:

In order to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand into other regions, an opportunity for collaboration between the private and public sector is needed. This opportunity can be achieved through outreach programs implemented at the local level.

Here are some other examples from this lesson:

⇒ Resistance to government efforts to introduce policies concerning equal-opportunity employment – this resistance

⇒ Larger companies – these companies

⇒ Claims that artificial hiring and promotion protocols would erode their competitive edge – these claims

Editing Tip: Activity 1

Look back at the paragraphs that you have written in this unit. Are there any opportunities to use the tip described above?

⇒ What did you find most interesting in this unit?

⇒ What did you find most challenging in this unit?

⇒ Is there anything that you would like further practice with?

Vocabulary Builder

The following words appear throughout this unit and are from the Academic Word List. They will be important for writing and reading academic texts written in English. Fill out the form by adding in the related words.

Keyword	Keyword type	Noun form	Verb form	Adjective form	Adverb form	Opposite by prefix
Appropriate	Adjective	Appropriateness	Appropriate	–	Appropriately	inappropriate
e.g.	The policy proved to be inappropriate and was discontinued.					
Aspect						
e.g.						
Conduct						
e.g.						
Generate						
e.g.						

Vocabulary Builder

Keyword	Keyword type	Noun form	Verb form	Adjective form	Adverb form	Opposite by prefix
Impact						
e.g.						
Implement						
e.g.						
Offset						
e.g.						
Significant						
e.g.						
Sufficient						
e.g.						