

Types of Paragraphs

The Descriptive Paragraph

A descriptive paragraph paints a word picture that appeals to a reader's senses. The clarity of the word picture depends on carefully selected words and precise details. Guiding the selection of words and details is the writer's focus and the impression he or she wants to create.

The details, particularly in visual description, are usually organized in some logical order. When a writer needs to clarify order he or she uses space words and phrases. These fall into three general categories: those indicating direction, those specifying distance, and those identifying area.

Describing a person is different from describing a place or a thing. The writer must strive to capture the

essence of a person by going beyond physical characteristics.

Often descriptions appeal to the sense of sight, however they may also appeal to the other senses (sound, taste, touch, smell), either individually or in combination.

The Explanatory Paragraph

A friend who was absent wants you to explain the English assignment. Your mother wants to know why you were late coming home from school. Your history teacher wants you to summarize the events leading to the Second World War. A stranger asks you for directions. In each of these situations you are being asked to explain something.

Explanations are often oral. However, they can also be written. When a written explanation takes the form of a paragraph, it is called an explanatory

paragraph. In its simplest most practical form, it is used to give instructions.

Explanatory paragraphs, other than those that give instructions, can be developed by using the following techniques: using facts or statistics, using specific examples, using an incident or anecdote, and using comparisons or contrasts. Whatever the technique, the writer does the same basic thing – he or she explains the idea presented in the topic sentence.

The Narrative Paragraph

The narrative paragraph is the telling of events. “Once upon a time...”; “Last night while I was watching television...”; “On the way to school this morning...” are just a few examples of kinds of phrases that signal the beginning of a narrative.

The narrative paragraph is a simple, natural form of writing that includes many variations. It may be based on fact or the imagination or on a combination of both. It may recall a personal experience of the writer or an event observed by, or related to the writer. It may be written in the first person or in the third person.

The events in a narrative paragraph are usually told in chronological order, the order in which they occurred in time. When chronological order is clear and direct, time words and phrases merely reinforce the flow of the narrative. However in passages in which the passage of time is uneven, time words are essential to understanding the events described.

Because narrative paragraphs are not always constructed like other kinds of paragraphs, they do not always have a topic sentence. There are times when the writer begins telling her story without making a preliminary controlling statement such as,

“I spent the day wandering aimlessly through the bright streets.” or “One day a strange thing happened.”

The Persuasive/Argumentative Paragraph

Persuasive writing attempts to convince the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid. To accomplish this, the writer must develop a limited topic which is well defined and debatable. It must have more than one side.

It is important that the author understand other sides of the position so that the strongest information to counter the others can be presented to the reader. In the paragraph itself, only one side of the issue is presented.

When writing a persuasive paragraph it is important to remember the purpose of your argument, what voice you will use to argue your case, who you are trying to convince (audience), techniques you will use and how you will go about organizing your points.