



UNIT 1

Introduction to the Paragraph

Objective

Develop the ability to write a paragraph in which a main idea is supported by several sentences which give details.

Introducing the Topic

A sentence is the basic unit of thought. When you write a paragraph, your basic thought, or main idea, becomes the topic sentence. You support that basic idea with enough information to make it clear and convincing. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. It is usually followed by at least three supporting sentences that give facts, examples, or reasons to back up the topic sentence. All the sentences in a paragraph are linked together so that the organization and development of the main idea is clear.



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Reading Selection 1

Thumbs Up!

We often use parts of our body to give emphasis and color to our meaning. We might say, for example, that someone “has a big heart” when we want to emphasize the person’s generosity or compassion. We tell someone to “keep your nose out of my business” when we feel they are too curious about our personal affairs. Moreover, we want to “get something off our chest” when we feel the need to express something we have been holding back. It seems that figures of speech taken from the human body are limitless.

However, no other part of the human anatomy seems to have more symbolic uses than the thumb. We say, for example, that a person is “all thumbs” when we want to emphasize the person’s awkwardness in doing something. This might have something to do with the fact that while the thumb is a very important and unique part of the human hand, it depends on the other four fingers to perform gracefully. And we don’t want to be “under the thumb” of our boss or some other authority figure because that means he or she has too

much control over us. That probably comes from the fact that we use our thumb to press down on something. You can also express your disapproval of someone by “thumbing your nose” at him or her, but don’t do that unless you really want to insult that person!

Still another figurative use of the thumb with a negative meaning is to give a “thumbs down” gesture to express disapproval. It is said that the Roman emperor made the gesture when he condemned a gladiator to death because of his poor performance in the arena. On the other hand, you make the “thumbs up” gesture when you want to respond positively to your friend’s questions.

There are still further symbolic expressions using the human thumb. We “thumb a ride” when we hitchhike. We have a “green thumb” when we are a skillful gardener. We “thumb through” a book when we are looking for information. Indeed, it seems that no other part of the human body appears so often in our everyday speech as the human thumb.



Building Vocabulary

Talking with Your Fingers

In Reading Selection 1, you learned a number of idioms that use the human thumb to express a particular idea. But of course, there are four other fingers on the human hand as well, and there are plenty of idioms that use them symbolically. The following are some of these idioms along with their meanings.

Idiom	Meaning
have a finger in every pie	be involved in a wide variety of activities
not lift a finger	not help or cooperate with someone
point the finger (at someone)	accuse (someone) of something
give (someone) the finger	insult someone by raising the middle finger
work one's fingers to the bone	work hard
get (one's) fingers burned	experience failure
have sticky fingers	often take things that don't belong to him or her
count something on (the fingers of) one hand	something is scarce
(let something) slip through one's fingers	fail to seize an opportunity
twist someone around one's little finger	get someone to do exactly what a person wants

Practice Fill in the blanks below with the most appropriate idiom from the list above. Be sure you adjust the language of the idiom to fit the grammar of the sentence.

- I really don't know how to help Tracy. I sure _____ when I tried to help.
- Roy seems to _____. I've never known anyone so active.
- I _____ but still was not able to finish the project on time.
- I'm sure it was Jean who took my lipstick. Everybody knows she _____.

- Kim's boyfriend does everything she asks him to. In fact, she _____.
- I've never been so insulted in my life! Did you see how that man just _____?
- I should have acted more quickly, but somehow I just let the opportunity _____.
- There are not many cities in the world as beautiful and historic as Paris in France. In fact, you can probably _____.
- When the teacher asked who threw the eraser across the room, Ruby immediately _____ Tommy.
- While all the other students worked hard to decorate the classroom for the party, Jake _____. He just sat there and watched.



Guidelines for Writing a Paragraph

The Structure of a Paragraph

A paragraph consists of three parts: "the topic," "the topic sentence," and "the supporting details."

- The topic is the subject you will write about.
- The topic sentence states your subject and your idea about the subject.
- The supporting details are the examples that explain the topic sentence.

Look at the first paragraph from Reading Selection 1:

We often use parts of our body to give emphasis and color to our meaning. We might say, for example, that someone “has a big heart” when we want to emphasize the person’s generosity or compassion. We tell someone to “keep your nose out of my business” when we feel they are too curious about our personal affairs. Moreover, we want to “get something off our chest” when we feel the need to express something we have been holding back. It seems that figures of speech taken from the human body are limitless.

This paragraph can be diagrammed in the following way:

The Subject	figures of speech taken from the human body
Topic Sentence	We often use parts of our body to give emphasis and color to our meaning.
Supporting Sentence 1	We might say, for example, that someone “has a big heart” when we want to emphasize the person’s generosity or compassion.
Supporting Sentence 2	We tell someone to “keep your nose out of my business” when we feel they are too curious about our personal affairs.
Supporting Sentence 3	Moreover, we want to “get something off our chest” when we feel the need to express something we have been holding back.

Look at the second paragraph from Reading Selection 1:

However, no other part of the human anatomy seems to have more symbolic uses than the thumb. We say, for example, that a person is “all thumbs” when we want to emphasize the person’s awkwardness in doing something. This might have something to do with the fact that while the thumb is a very important and unique part of the human hand, it depends on the other four fingers to perform gracefully. And we don’t want to be “under the thumb” of our boss or some other authority figure because that means he or she has too much control over us. That probably comes from the fact that we use our thumb to press down on something. You can also express your disapproval of someone by “thumbing your nose” at him or her, but don’t do that unless you really want to insult that person!

This paragraph can be diagrammed in the following way:

Topic Sentence	However, no other part of the human anatomy seems to have more symbolic uses than the thumb.
Supporting Sentence 1	We say that a person is “all thumbs” when we want to emphasize the person’s awkwardness in doing something.
Supporting Sentence 2	And we don’t want to be “under the thumb” of our boss or some other authority figure because that means he or she has too much control over us.
Supporting Sentence 3	You can also express your disapproval of someone by “thumbing your nose” at him or her.



Practice Read the following paragraph and then fill in the form that follows.

Music changes with the culture, and the music that your parents listened to is probably vastly different from the music you like best. For example, the popular music of your grandparents' era was characterized by the "Big Band" sound. That is, the sound was smooth and easy, and it was perfect for romantic dancing. But then in the early 1950s along came Elvis Presley, who ushered in a kind of music that quickly became known as rock 'n' roll. There was a different beat to Elvis' music and a different look. He sang the lyrics as if he were slightly drunk. He swung his hips and became known as "Elvis the Pelvis." Also, he sang to the backdrop of an amplified guitar, coming down hard on the beat, a style of music black musicians had often used. After Elvis, pop music would never again sound like it had in the old days.

Topic Sentence	
Supporting Sentence 1	<i>The popular music of your grandparents' era was characterized by the "Big Band" sound.</i>
Supporting Sentence 2	
Supporting Sentence 3	<i>After Elvis, pop music would never again sound like it had in the old days.</i>

Reading Selection 2

Earthquake! Run for Your Life!



An earthquake is one of the most destructive of all natural disasters. Just ask any survivor of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. That terrible event had two deadly consequences. It released large amounts of radioactivity into the ground and was followed by gigantic tsunamis that washed away entire seaside villages. Or remember the "Quake of the Century" in central Taiwan in 1999, which left more than 100,000 people homeless. Also, the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake near Tianjin, China is considered to be one of the largest earthquakes of the 20th century. The total number of people killed or seriously wounded topped out at more than 400,000 people.

Typhoons, hurricanes, and tornadoes can often be predicted. What about earthquakes? Traditional Chinese society has long believed that certain animals have a heightened

sensitivity to slight movements under the crust of the earth, which alerts them to an impending earthquake. They then adjust their behavior accordingly. Before an earthquake strikes, for example, chickens have been observed keeping their feet firmly on the ground rather than roosting at night on a pole or branch as is their custom. Similarly, snakes emerge from their holes in the ground. Dogs—even normally quiet and docile ones—bark much more than they usually do.

Similar folk wisdom exists in traditional Japanese society. Before the Great Hanshin Earthquake, large schools of fish were sighted swimming near the surface of the water. In addition, the Japanese have long observed that crows and pigeons are especially noisy before an earthquake strikes. They also report that at such a time other species of birds have been observed flying in unusual patterns.



However, the Japanese have developed more scientific ways of predicting an earthquake. Scientists there have observed a chemical change in ground water before an earthquake strikes. Furthermore, wiring of land and sea alerts experts when all-but-undetectable movements in the earth signal an impending violent occurrence.

Still, it is important that people living in

earthquake-prone areas of the world should be aware of how to prepare for the possibility of a devastating earthquake. Architects and builders must design and build stronger, earthquake-proof buildings, and citizens must take measures in their own homes to provide a better chance of survival. But nature is more powerful than human beings. There is no better proof of this than what happens when an earthquake strikes.



Building Vocabulary

Prone or Proof?

In Reading Selection 2, you are told how important it is for people living in “earthquake-prone” parts of the world to be able to predict when an earthquake is going to occur. Also, in the final paragraph, you learn that living in an “earthquake-proof” building lessens the negative impact of an earthquake. The words “prone” and “proof” can be attached to other words to produce ideas with opposite meaning. Something that is “prone” to happen is likely to happen, while something that is “proof” prevents something from happening. On the next page are some examples of how you can use “prone” and “proof.”

Expression using “prone”	prone to anger	prone to error	prone to being late
	prone to fail	prone to gain weight	prone to lie
(Occasionally, “prone” is attached to a word to form a hyphenated compound, as in “accident-prone.”)			
Word formed with “proof”	bulletproof	fireproof	foolproof
	rainproof	shatterproof	waterproof

Practice Fill in the blanks below with the most suitable choice of words or expressions from the list above.

- Police often wear _____ vests to lessen the possibility of being seriously wounded or killed by a criminal armed with a gun.
- Because Justin is _____, he should spend more time in the gym working out.
- When you’re writing on the computer, saving your data every few minutes is a _____ method of not losing it if the electricity should suddenly go off.
- Living in a _____ building is the best way to ensure you survive a fire.
- If you’re _____, it’s a good idea to leave early for an important engagement to ensure timely arrival.
- Lately, Jessie has been _____. Try not to upset him.
- Because it was so stormy outside, Betty wore her _____ coat when going out.
- Amanda is so _____ that you can never be sure whether she is telling the truth or not.
- Most automobiles are equipped with _____ glass to minimize serious injury in case of an accident.
- Because the work of that careless employee is so _____, the boss has decided to fire him.

Guidelines for Writing a Paragraph

A. Characteristics of a Topic Sentence

A topic sentence consists of two parts: a topic and a limiting idea about the topic. Look at the first sentence of Reading Section 1.

- We often use parts of our body to give emphasis and color to our meaning.

The topic of the sentence	we often use parts of the human body
The limiting idea of the topic	(we often use parts of the human body) to give emphasis and color to our meaning

Now look at the first sentence of Reading Section 2.

- An earthquake is one of the most destructive of all natural disasters.

The topic of the sentence	an earthquake
The limiting idea of the topic	(an earthquake) is one of the most destructive of all natural disasters

Note that the limiting idea makes a topic specific. A limiting idea can be factual information or the writer's opinion about the topic.

Practice For each sentence below, underline the topic with a single line and the limiting idea about the topic with a double line. The first one has been done for you.

1. The use of cell phones should be forbidden on all forms of public transportation.
2. Action movies usually have a lot of special effects.
3. Computers allow the users to perform a wide variety of useful tasks.
4. An occasional piece of dark chocolate can actually be good for your health.
5. The Japanese people have a highly developed sense of formal politeness.
6. Foreign travel can introduce a person to all kinds of new ideas and experience.

7. Smoking is a dangerous habit that should be severely restricted by the government.
8. Religion is an attempt to understand the unknowable.
9. Joining after-school activities is a way to meet new people and learn new skills.
10. Reading poetry helps develop an appreciation of the beauty of language.

B. Providing Specific Examples to Support Your Point

The first step in writing an effective paragraph is to start with a clear opening point. The second step is to support that point with such specific evidence as reasons, facts, and examples. The supporting details serve two key functions. First, they arouse the reader's curiosity and make reading a pleasure. Second, they convince the reader that the writer's point is a valid one. In addition, the supporting details also give specific examples so that the reader can understand more clearly the general idea.

For example, in the first paragraph of Reading Selection 1, the writer's opening point is that "we often use parts of our body to give emphasis and color to our meaning." That is a general statement. In order to prove the point, the writer then gives three supporting details:

Supporting Sentence 1	We might say that someone "has a big heart" when we want to emphasize the person's generosity or compassion.
Supporting Sentence 2	We tell someone to "keep your nose out of my business" when we feel they are too curious about our personal affairs.
Supporting Sentence 3	We want to "get something off our chest" when we feel the need to express something we have been holding back.

In Reading Selection 2, the writer says that "an earthquake is one of the most destructive of all natural disasters." This general statement is then supported by three concrete examples:

- the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011
- the "Quake of the Century" in central Taiwan in 1999
- the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake near Tianjin, China

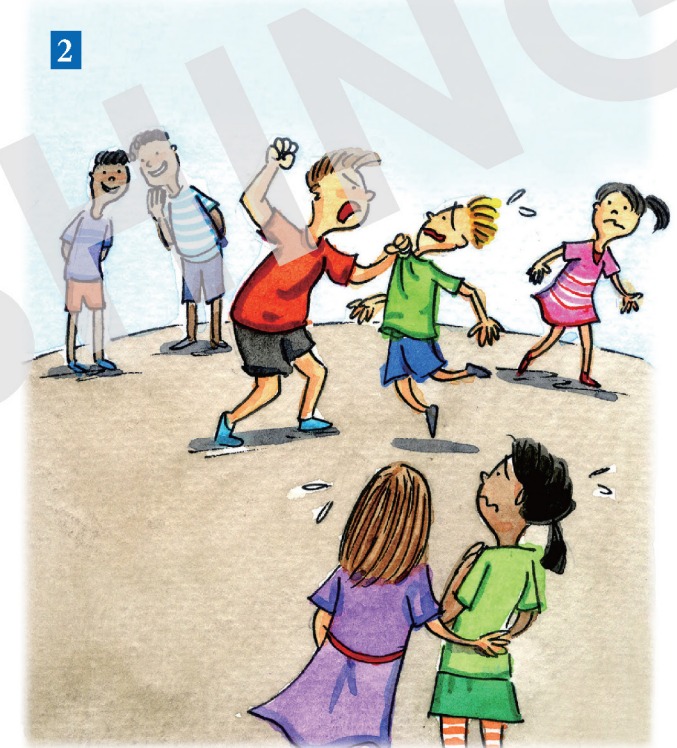
Practice Each of the following paragraphs makes a clear opening point (the topic sentence), followed by several sentences that develop that point. Which group of sentences in each set (a. or b.) adequately develops the main point because specific details are given? Which group is repetitive, vague, and lacking in detail? Check the better one.

1. Topic Sentence: My little brother is not always easy to be around.
 - a. He is noisy and makes me nervous. Sometimes he is nice. He won't leave me alone. I try to avoid him sometimes. He interrupts me when I am doing something important.
 - b. He is really noisy, especially when I am trying to study or reading a book. He gets on my nerves by constantly asking questions and interrupting me when I am talking to someone else. That's why I'm always looking for a private place where I can get away from him for awhile.
2. Topic Sentence: Computers of the future will be vastly different from those we use today.
 - a. For one thing, they will be unimaginably fast. One expert's prediction is that by 2029, an ordinary desktop computer will have the computing ability of 1,000 human brains. For another thing, they will be able to recognize a user's voice and interact with that user in a human-sounding voice. But perhaps the most important difference is that they will be able to recognize patterns and draw conclusions, much in the manner of the human brain.
 - b. They will be different in many ways. They will be fast. They will work well and cheaper. Another way is they will sound more human. And another way is they will work like the human brain. All these ways will make the computers of tomorrow very different from those of today.

Focus on Writing

Pre-writing Activity

Choose one of the pictures below and quickly write down the first words that come to your mind.



Starting to Write

A. Writing a Topic Sentence

The following are topics, not topic sentences, because they lack a limiting idea.

Topic		
airplanes	classical music	computers
cyberbullying	extreme sports	fast food
modern technology	my boyfriend/girlfriend	falling in love
gossiping	growing up	driving a car on a rainy night
watching a basketball game		

Here are some examples of topic sentences using the above topics.

1. Airplanes fly much faster today than they did fifty years ago.
2. Classical music often expresses deep feelings of joy or sadness.
3. Computers are now found in homes and offices all over the world.
4. Fast food is often tasty, but it is not very healthy.
5. My boyfriend is my ideal of “the boy next door”: handsome, charming, and fun to be with.

Practice 1 Choose five topics from the list above and write topic sentences for them.

1. Topic: _____

Topic Sentence: _____

2. Topic: _____

Topic Sentence: _____

3. Topic: _____

Topic Sentence: _____

4. Topic: _____

Topic Sentence: _____

5. Topic: _____

Topic Sentence: _____

Practice 2 Below are two groups of supporting sentences. Study the sentences carefully and then write a topic sentence for each group.

Example

The price of a hamburger and fries is more than NT\$100! And it costs twice that much to go to a movie. Even riding the MRT in Taipei City seems expensive if you have to do it often.

Topic Sentence: Everything seems so much more expensive today.

1. Here is what happened to me today. I didn't hear the alarm clock and overslept. That meant that I was almost an hour late for school. Then, during class, I was embarrassed because I didn't know the answer to the question the teacher asked me. Finally, when going home after school, I accidentally left my book bag on the bus. All these things almost made me wish I had stayed in bed today!

Topic Sentence: _____

2. First of all, that person should be kind and considerate. Of course, physical looks are important, too. Who doesn't enjoy looking at a handsome man or a beautiful woman? It would be nice to find someone who is both kind and good-looking. That would indeed be my ideal partner!

Topic Sentence: _____

B. Writing Supporting Details

One of the most difficult tasks for a student writer is supporting his or her most important points. That's why it is so essential before you begin writing to jot down all the details that come to mind regarding your main ideas. For example, your topic sentence is about how your cell phone has become your most treasured possession. But it's not enough simply to say that the reason is because you can take it with you wherever you go. You must consider all the other reasons that cause you to treasure your cell phone. Perhaps another reason is that it makes you feel more secure in an emergency. Still another reason may be that you can send text messages to someone who is unavailable to talk at that moment. See how more interesting your writing becomes with the supporting details?

Practice Provide three concrete details that support each of the following points or topic sentences. You can state your details briefly in phrases rather than in complete sentences.

Example

Topic Sentence: In the Bible, Jesus Christ performs many miracles.

Supporting Detail 1: He turns a small amount of bread and fish into enough food to feed a large crowd of people.

Supporting Detail 2: He walks on water.

Supporting Detail 3: He brings a dead man back to life.

1. **Topic Sentence:** I have decided I don't really like camping very much.

Supporting Detail 1: _____

Supporting Detail 2: _____

Supporting Detail 3: _____

2. **Topic Sentence:** Fast food can be tasty, but it is not very healthy.

Supporting Detail 1: _____

Supporting Detail 2: _____

Supporting Detail 3: _____

3. **Topic Sentence:** I think I have finally found my ideal romantic partner.

Supporting Detail 1: _____

Supporting Detail 2: _____

Supporting Detail 3: _____

C. Writing a Paragraph

First, look at the pictures below which tell the story of the harmful effects of taking steroids.



Now look at the topic sentence below and the supporting sentences that explain the pictures on the previous page.

Everyone wants to look good. Probably most of us spend time looking at ourselves in a mirror and wondering how to improve our appearance. Personal grooming is important, of course, plus a healthy lifestyle. But some people do more. Boys, especially, feel they can build more attractive bodies by working out in a weight room. That's fine. But some young men still feel inadequate, and they resort to taking steroids to improve their appearance. Steroids can have a number of negative consequences. They can cause shortness of breath and even lead to fainting spells. They can cause fever and weaken the body so much that the person can do nothing but stay in bed all day. They might even result in the person being rushed to the hospital in a serious condition. It's better to stay healthy with the body and looks you were born with.

Practice 1 Add three supporting sentences to the topic sentence below and then write a paragraph.

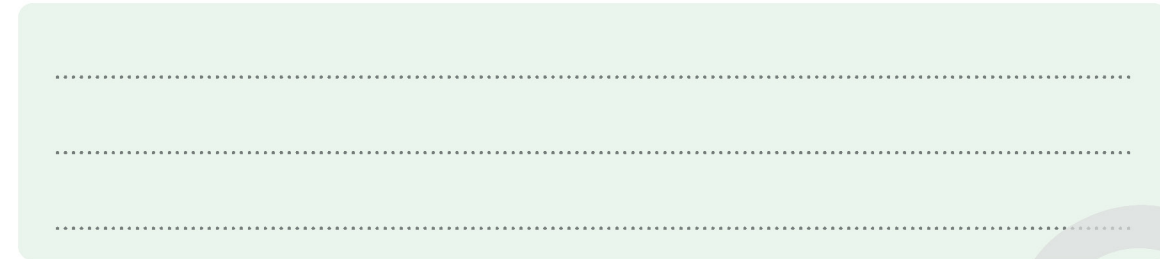
Topic Sentence: Learning from one's mistakes is a very important skill in life.

Supporting Sentence 1: _____

Supporting Sentence 2: _____

Supporting Sentence 3: _____

Write your paragraph here:



Practice 2 Choose one of the topics below, turn it into a topic sentence, add three supporting sentences, and then write a paragraph.

cyberbullying

text messaging

cheating

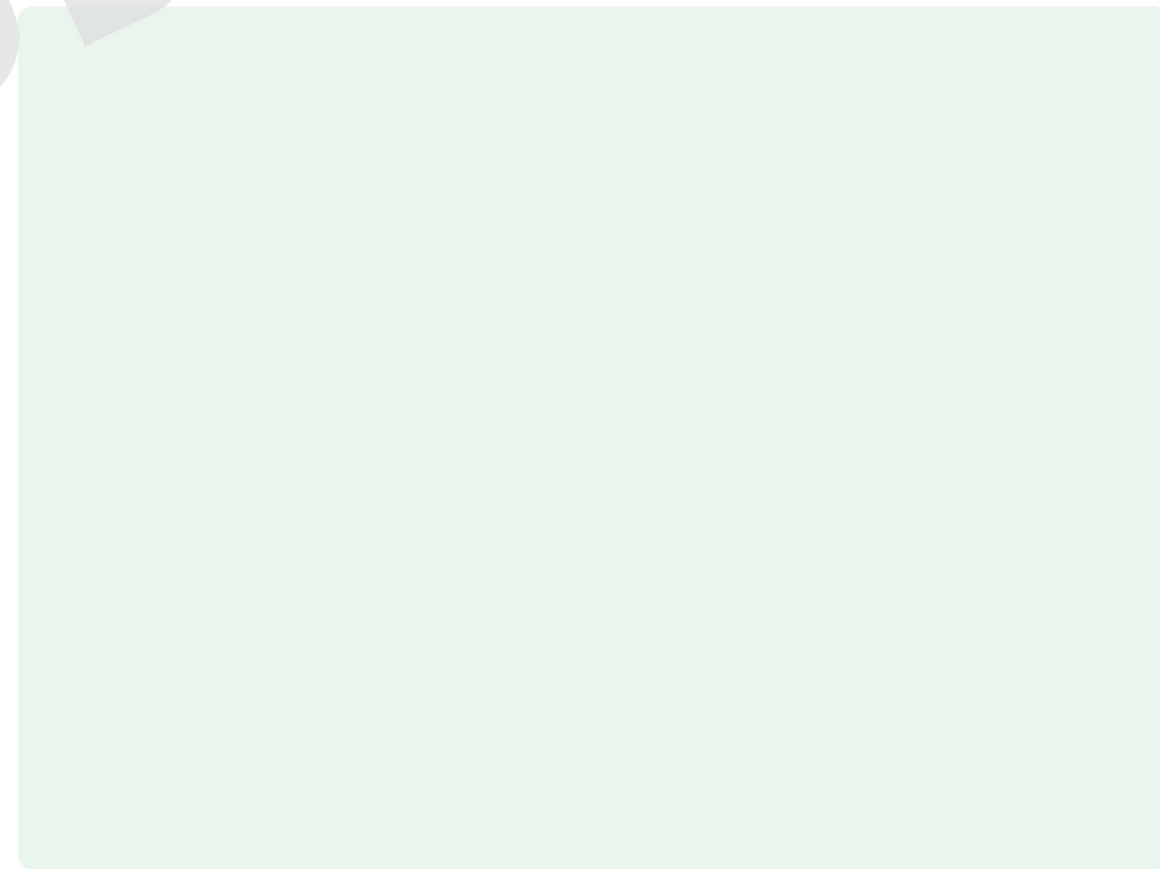
Topic Sentence: _____

Supporting Sentence 1: _____

Supporting Sentence 2: _____

Supporting Sentence 3: _____

Write your paragraph here:



Making Your Writing More Specific (1)

Writing is more fun to read when it is more specific. You can make your sentences more interesting by paying careful attention to the words you choose.

A. Using More Specific Nouns

A noun is a word that tells who or what did the action. The more specific your nouns are, the more colorful your writing is. For example, you might write a sentence that reads like this: “We use our bodies to help communicate.” But look how much more interesting the sentences are in Reading Selection 1:

- We might say that someone “has a big heart” when we want to emphasize the person’s generosity or compassion.
- We have a “green thumb” when we are a skillful gardener.

Here’s an example in Reading Selection 2. Instead of a sentence that might have read like this: “Before an earthquake, the behavior of fish changed,” we find a much more colorful and interesting one:

- Before the Great Hanshin Earthquake, large schools of fish were sighted swimming near the surface of the water.

Practice Rewrite the paragraph below by using more specific nouns to replace the ones that are underlined.

It was a hot summer afternoon. The person went into the store to buy something. At the counter, he handed the person some money and only got a little back. “Wow!” he thought. “Things are so expensive these days!” He put the purchase in his clothes and went outside. It was still so hot that he wished he had also bought something else. But he didn’t have enough money left.

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B. Choosing Specific Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe nouns and pronouns, and they help make your writing more specific. Look at these sentences:

1. a. Dogs—even normally nice dogs—bark a lot.
b. Dogs—even normally quiet and docile dogs—bark much more than they usually do.
2. a. Pop music was different and nice to dance to.
b. Pop music was smooth, easy, and perfect for romantic dancing.

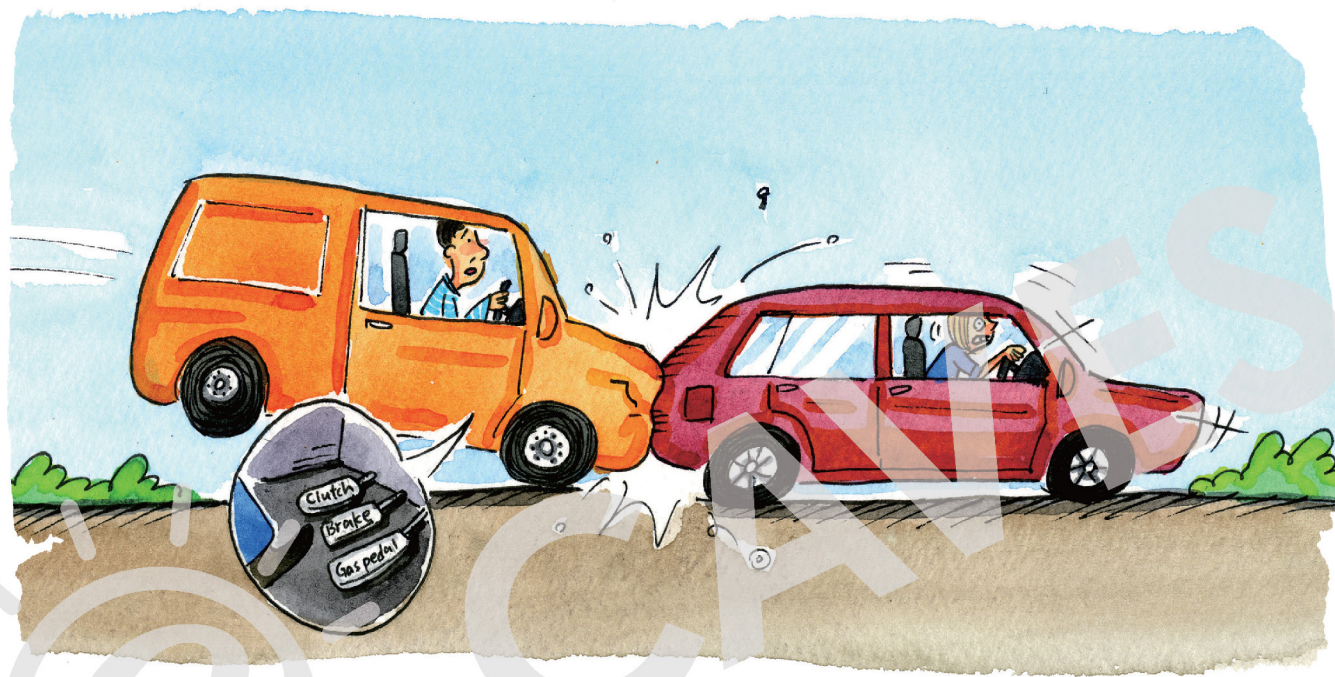
Which sentences are more interesting and give you more information? Obviously, the second sentences which use specific adjectives to describe nouns are much more colorful.

Practice Each sentence that follows gives a choice of two adjectives. Circle the adjective that makes the sentence more specific.

1. The book was so (good / fascinating) that I read it twice.
2. The weather in the mountain was very (stormy / bad), so we had to cancel our plan to climb to the top.
3. It was very (nice / thoughtful) of you to send me a letter of condolence after my grandfather died.
4. The new cell phones are so (small / compact)!
5. The (mischievous / bad) boy is always doing something (naughty / wrong) despite his parents' attempt to correct his behavior.

C. Using Specific Verbs

Look at the picture and read the sentence that describes it.



- The driver's foot came off the brakes, and his car ran into the car ahead of him.

The underlined words in the sentence are verbs. They tell what happens and accurately describe the picture. But look at how more interesting the sentence becomes when the verbs are more specific:

- The driver's foot slipped off the brakes, and his car crashed into the car ahead of him.

Practice 1 Next to each verb below, write two verbs that are more specific. You can choose from the verbs in the box below, or you can use some verbs of your own. The first one has been done for you.

inquire	arrive	stroll	nibble	borrow	announce
explain	ride	swallow	converse	grasp	doze
glance	promise	stare	dash	dine	request
hurry	shout	turn	pat	invite	chew
gaze	nap	lecture	reply	discuss	hug
grab	jump	whisper	race	catch	pinch

1. touch: pat, pinch
2. talk: _____
3. walk: _____
4. look: _____
5. sleep: _____
6. ask: _____
7. hold: _____
8. move: _____
9. eat: _____
10. run: _____

Practice 2 All of the verbs are underlined in the following sentences. Use more specific verbs and rewrite the paragraph. Be sure to change the grammar when required. You can use some of the verbs from Practice 1, or you can think of some other verbs of your own.

Harry looked at the clock and knew he had overslept. He ate a few bites of breakfast, took his coat, and went out the door. He ran to the bus stop, but he was too late to take the bus. When he finally got to school, he said to the teacher why he was late. The teacher said that he should be more careful in the future.

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UNIT **2**

Explaining a Process

Objective

Explain the steps by which something is done, or how something comes into being.

Introducing the Topic

A process is a series of steps carried out in a certain order. In this unit, you will learn to write a process paragraph that clearly explains how to do or make something, or how something was created. There are two kinds of process paragraphs: directive and informative. In a paragraph that presents a directive process, you explain the steps in doing something, such as cooking a particular dish or using a new smartphone app. Because you are speaking directly to the reader, you can address him or her as "you." In an informative process paragraph, you explain how something occurred. Because you are not telling the reader how to do something, you seldom use the pronoun "you."

