

Johnson County Community College

METHODS OF DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

The modes for developing paragraphs fall into the following four groups:

Description: A paragraph developed by detail, the topic sentence is supported by factual material, either sense impressions or conceptual facts. Almost all writing has some detail in it. The descriptive mode takes the whole (relationship, place, process, etc.), breaks or divides it into parts or events, and treats each separately. The basic objective of descriptive writing is the depiction of the appearance of people, places, and things. The writer helps recreate for the reader sense impressions (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) that have been experienced or observed by the writer. Keep in mind that the purpose of the writing and the audience must be determined: to focus on the writer's experiences is the expressive aim, to inform or explain information is the expository aim, and to persuade or argue the reader to one side of an issue is the persuasive aim.

Narrative: The basic objective of narrative writing is the recreation of a sequence of events. The elements of a good narrative are characters, a natural time sequence, plot, dialogue, and a point worth considering.

Evaluation: The basis of an evaluative paragraph or essay is to put a value on something (literature, drama, objects, food, wine, movies, etc.) To begin an evaluation the writer must first set the criteria on which the object is being judged.

Classification: The classification paragraph is usually expository and is a process of grouping terms or ideas that are related in some specific way.

Other methods of development help the writer to further organize his/her ideas.

Cause/Effect or Effect/Cause-Usually an analysis mode (or descriptive mode) this process of organizing a paragraph breaks the topic into its parts to establish a cause-effect relationship among the parts. It carefully scrutinizes the relationship between cause and effect. This method may also be in the narrative mode of chronological order as one sequence follows another.

Analysis or Process Analysis- This method of developing a paragraph is the process of separating an object or concept into its parts and then explaining how they are related to the whole. The functional analysis is usually a sequence of operations or actions by which something is done or made (how to do it). Generally, it is descriptive in mode with a spatial order of development.

Example or Illustration-Examples and illustrations are used in almost all types or modes of writing to help support points that the writer is making. The **example paragraph** reaches a conclusion (topic sentence) as a result of observing a number of examples and then forms a generalization called induction. One of the most effective ways to support the validity of a conclusion is to relate a few typical examples that led you to such a conclusion in the first place. An example is a specific detail used to attempt to make an abstract idea concrete or a general idea specific. The **illustration paragraph** is similar to the example paragraph because it, too, is

specific in time, place, and action. The main difference is that the illustration paragraph is a story (true or untrue) that supports or develops a main point (the topic sentence). Therefore, an illustration takes the narrative mode and will be in chronological order. When using an illustration to support the validity of a conclusion, make sure that the illustration is concise and to the point, so that the reader does not lose sight of the main idea of the paragraph. The chief value of illustration is its potential to be interesting because all readers like a story.

Comparison or Contrast- Another method of developing paragraphs is through comparison or contrast. Comparison shows similarities while a contrast shows differences. The main reason for using this method is to explain an unfamiliar object or idea by comparing or contrasting it to a familiar object or idea. The writer may develop the paragraph or essay by first discussing all of one subject and then fully presenting the second subject, or the writer might discuss one like or different trait with each subject and then move to other characteristics, thus discussing both subjects together. A third method might be to present all of the ways that the subjects are alike and then discuss all of the ways that the subjects are different.

Problem/Solution- In a problem/solution paragraph or essay the writer begins by explaining the problem (causes and effects may be used) and then presents a solution or several solutions. If the writer is trying to convince the reader of a best solution, the aim is persuasive.

Definition- A paragraph that is developed by definition answers the question "What is it?" Usually expository or informational, the definition may be one sentence or extended to be a paragraph, theme, or even a book. It is usually combined with other methods of development. The definition is intended to clarify meaning; thus, it should identify essential qualities and limit the term's meaning.

Facts, Figures or Statistics, Quotations- Using these forms of detail will help develop many topics. It is important to remember that they should be accurate and a source should be given.

Practice Exercise A : Read each paragraph to identify which method of development (description, narration, evaluation, classification, cause/effect, analysis, example/illustration, comparison/contrast, problem/solution, definition) and the aim (expressive, explanatory, or persuasive) is the main one used.

_____ 1. In explaining the voodoo effect medically, Cannon theorized that what happens to curse victims is a case of self-induced shock brought on by "prolonged and intense emotion." Experiments with animals put under intense stress and case histories of soldiers in battle situations, he says, have shown one of the physical after-effects of intense stress is an extreme drop in blood pressure. Shock occurs as a result of the rush of adrenaline. The body's blood vessels constrict, or tighten up, cutting down the blood supply to the body. Starved of oxygen-carrying blood, vital organs start breaking down, the heart starts faltering and eventually death occurs. This, combined with the fact-that the victim often refuses all food and water, is responsible for the killing effect.

_____ 2. Medicine has already drawn up a list of illnesses such as asthma and hypertension that are labeled as psychosomatic, but there is more evidence being collected by Dr. Seligman, by Dr. Greene and his colleagues at the University of Rochester and by others that the mind has a strong effect on the physical health of a person. In short, illnesses thought to be purely physical such as cancer may have a psychological component. And this consciousness is spreading. At a symposium on the West Coast to discuss the topic, "Ways of Healing: Ancient and Modern," the doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists gathered there came to two unstartling conclusions: that non-Western, supposedly primitive systems of medicine actually work; and that a patient's mind can have a direct effect on his physical health.

--Lynn Quitman Troyka, *Structured Reading*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978, p.121

_____ 3. As Maria hurriedly left for church last Easter, she threw a twenty-dollar bill into the trashcan, thinking she was discarding a wad of tissue. You can imagine her surprise when the garbage man rang our doorbell that Monday morning and handed her twenty dollars. The honesty of Shorewood's garbage men has restored Maria's faith in mankind.

_____ 4. After Mary Jane's birthday party, this place was a mess! Unclaimed jackets and sticky hair-ribbons were among the rubble everywhere. Broken balloons and cracked balsa planes were jammed in with ripped envelopes among the birthday cards on the shelves. All over the sofa were lardy smudges of whipped frosting. The clutter of peanut shells and shreds of Holly Bobbie wrappings crackled as I stepped toward the door.

_____ 5. Only a gem expert can distinguish between a real diamond and the very latest synthetic substitute. Both gleam, glisten, sparkle, and reflect ice-like gradations of blue brilliance. However, if these jewels were subjected to dish water and other household solutions, even the most casual observer would spot the difference.

_____ 6. The elderly who are disengaged develop a sense of time which is different from yours or mine. It seems that they experience some days as interminable and others as still off in the future. The past month may lapse out-of-reach while forty years ago is only yesterday or even now. Time changes for some oldsters, and we all change in time.

_____ 7. We tend to equate saying "no" to someone with being unlikable. Not long ago, I, myself, realized that I was wanting to refuse invitations, but instead I was forcing myself to suffer through boring cocktail parties and stuffy dinner gatherings. I also found that no matter how half-hearted I felt about doing favors for others, I was never saying "no" to them either. Isn't it time for friends to be honest with one another?

_____ 8. Going to the Writing Center helped me to raise my grade in English. I was shocked when I received my first graded paper in Composition I. I had five major errors, so I received a D. I had never received this low of a grade in high school. I took the paper to the Writing Center where one of the tutors discussed each error with me. In addition to that help, I also, began writing my next paper in the Writing Center and asked questions whenever I had a problem. Imagine my delight when my next graded paper was returned with an A on it!

Practice Exercise B: Add enough information to make each paragraph fully developed. Then indicate which of the methods you have used: description, definition, analysis, facts and figures, comparison/contrast, narrative, cause/effect, example/illustration, problem/solution, classification, evaluation, persuasive.

1. method (s) _____

You have probably wondered why this dishwasher is rated the best by Consumers' Union.

2. method (s) _____

Neatness is a matter of perspective.

3. method (s) _____

If you really want to improve morale in your office or plant, listen to this: employees want the truth.

4. method (s) _____

Unless more nurses are hired, this hospital can accept no more than our present load of patients.

5. method (s) _____

Mother always felt that children should be seen and not heard, at least when guests were around.

Checking for full development of every point is important. Once you identify the function of every sentence in your paragraphs, you know if a sentence belongs where it is and how it contributes to the main idea. Also, you know whether you have fully developed your point.

Practice Exercise C

Read the following paragraph and then analyze the paragraph development.

The popularity of soap operas reflects psychological needs of Americans. It is not surprising that more viewers than ever before are staring at soaps even though many homemakers are leaving home for outside jobs. At home alone, any wife still finds that folding laundry is less tedious if she vicariously engages in a love tryst or orders maid service on "As the World Turns" or another juicy soap. Even her husband is likely to join the ranks of late-night soap addicts just to escape from the aftermath of his daily on-the-job hassles. The psychological appeal of "General Hospital" or "All My Children" is easy to see, too, among the elderly and retired. After all, when you are lonely and idle or just unable to get out, it's easy to fill the void with somebody else's troubles and forget yours.

1. The topic sentence is

2. These are the points used to develop the topic sentence idea. (Add letters for any additional points.)

a)

b)

c)

3. For some of the points, additional information is given. (Add letters for any additional points.)

a) To explain point (a, b, c, etc.), the paragraph provides this information:

b) To explain specific ____ the paragraph provides this information:

c) To explain specific ____ the paragraph provides this information: