

Handout Number 19

Paragraph Structure

The following model contains all the elements of a good paragraph. Read it carefully two or three times and try to analyze its structure.

Model: Paragraph Structure:

Gold

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty-three centuries ago. Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications. The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection outside the spaceship. In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

The Three Parts of a Paragraph

A paragraph has three major structural parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

The **topic sentence** states the main idea of the paragraph. It not only names the topic of the paragraph, but it also limits the topic to one or two areas that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph. The specific area is called the controlling idea. Notice how the topic sentence of the model states both the topic and the controlling idea:

(Topic)

(Controlling Idea)

- Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics.

Supporting sentences develop the topic sentence. That is, they explain the topic sentence by giving reasons, examples, facts, statistics, and quotations. Some of the supporting sentences that explain the topic sentence about gold are

- First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion.
- For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty-three centuries ago.
- Another important characteristic of gold is its utility in industry and science.
- The most recent application of gold is in astronauts' suits.

The **concluding sentence** signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember:

- In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

Reference: Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1991). *Writing Academic English*. California: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

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