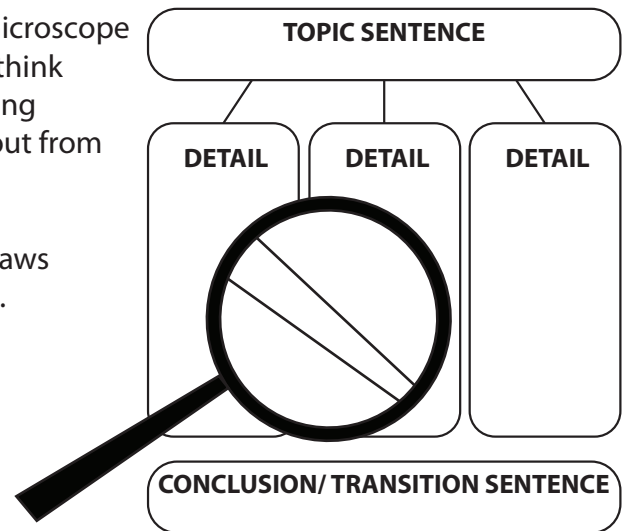


Studying Paragraphs

Writing paragraphs is like looking at something under a microscope or a magnifying glass. First, you see the whole object and think about it as a whole. Then you look at it under the magnifying glass and see different parts and details. Then you take it out from under the magnification and see the whole again.

The first sentence is usually called the topic sentence. It draws the reader in and helps them think about the general idea. Then the writer zooms in and provides some details in the body of the paragraph. Finally, the author zooms back out with a general statement that ties the details together, touches back on the topic sentence, or transitions to the next idea.



Use an excerpt from the great book *The Secret Agent Training Manual: How to Make and Break Top Secret Messages* by Elizabeth Singer Hunt to study paragraph structure. Examine the paragraphs below. The page is broken up by graphics, but if you look closely for the indent, you will see there are two, perhaps three paragraphs.

1. Circle the topic sentences.
2. Underline the details.
3. Zig-zag underline the sentences that tie up, summarize, or transition the idea to the next paragraph.

History of Cryptography

For thousands of years, people have used “cryptography,” or the art of hiding top secret messages. Some of the earliest examples of cryptography can be found in the writings of the ancient Greeks. More than 2,400 years ago (during the fifth century B.C.), a well-known historian named Herodotus sent a note to his fellow Greeks that the Persian army was about to attack. He did this by concealing his message on a wooden writing tablet covered in wax. Once the wax was scraped off, his message was revealed.

Around the same time, another Greek named Histiaeus reportedly used a man’s head to send his message. He shaved the man’s scalp, tattooed the message on it, waited for the man’s hair to grow back, and then sent the man off to deliver the note. Other Greeks were known to stuff their messages in the bodies of dead animals. This kind of cryptography—when communications are hidden in or on something—is called “steganography.”

Reflection Questions for Discussion:

1. How do the topic sentences introduce the idea and get the reader interested?
Topic sentences use an interesting detail to hook the reader into reading the rest of the piece.
2. Do the final sentences in each paragraph tie the ideas in the paragraphs together or transition the reader to the next sentence? Or both?
Discuss as a class or small group. Responses will vary depending on the paragraph.