

ELF Workshop – How to Structure Your Academic Paragraph

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I. Tips for Writing

1. Read the prompt and all instructions carefully.
2. Brainstorming – think of or write down your response with three different supporting ideas (reasons) and an explanation and real-life example for each one.
3. Write the way you speak, but speak as academically as you can.
4. Writing is a recursive process. First, express your thoughts simply and write them down; then, go back and improve vocabulary and/or ideas. If possible, use nicer verbs, add fitting adjectives, etc. Perhaps you can also add more or better explanations and/or examples.

II. Structure of a Paragraph

1. The topic sentence answers the question in the prompt or follows its instructions. It is the point, the main idea, and the most general sentence of the whole paragraph. It promises the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. It is usually the first sentence of the paragraph.
2. First transition word, your first supporting idea (reason), followed by an explanation and example; then, explain why this supporting idea is important.
3. Second transition word, your second supporting idea (reason), followed by an explanation and example; then, explain why this supporting idea is important.
4. Third transition word, your third supporting idea (reason), followed by an explanation and example; then, explain why this supporting idea is important.
5. The concluding sentence is another way of saying the topic sentence, often in different words and/or a new sentence pattern.

III. Simple Example Paragraph

How can college students manage their work effectively?

There are three very effective strategies for college students to manage their work. First, students can make a schedule to give themselves their best time for studying and doing assignments. *For example*, I am most productive in the late morning or in the afternoon, so I try to schedule my work time then. It is important to have a set time to do homework so learners do not get tempted to do other activities. Second, college students may find it helpful to prioritize their homework. It is a good idea to start with the most urgent tasks first and then work on less pressing ones. *For instance*, my tutee Jessica, a very successful student, always tries to do this even when she would rather do homework for her favorite subject first. She knows that this strategy will ensure that she can get her work done by the time it is due. Third, to be able to handle big projects, it is recommended that students start early. That way, they have enough time to break the task into smaller, more manageable parts. *To exemplify*, I work with a student who likes to start her projects the same day she gets the assignment because she feels it is less stressful and she can do better work when she has as much time as possible. By allowing enough time, a project might not seem so overwhelming. In conclusion, college students can accomplish all their tasks if they devote their time to doing them, work on urgent assignments first, and do not procrastinate.

IV. Important Grammar and Words in a Paragraph

1. Parallel structure – the use of the same grammar form for a list (in a summary of supporting ideas in a concluding sentence, for example)
2. Synonyms – the use of synonyms to avoid repeating words
3. Pronouns – the use of personal and demonstrative pronouns to avoid repeating words
4. Transition words – the use of these words allows the reader to follow the writer's thoughts easily

V. If a Prompt Only Gives Instructions

Some prompts may not include a question, but give instructions. Here is an example:

Discuss three causes of stress in your life. For each, describe and/or explain the cause and give a specific detailed example that illustrates your idea.

Just imagine the first sentence in the form of a question. For example, what are three causes of stress in your life? For each (cause), describe and/or explain the cause and give a specific detailed example that illustrates your idea.

VI. Practice Prompts

1. What can American parents do to help their children enjoy learning?
2. What can residents of California do to conserve water?
3. Discuss three challenges you had to overcome in your life. For each, describe and/or explain the challenge and give a specific detailed example that illustrates your idea.