

Paragraphs and “Skeletons”

One way to build up a paragraph is to start with the five (or six, or seven) most important sentences and use them as a “skeleton” for your paragraph. This is good both because:

1. It's a very organized way of working, which helps you make sure you have good structure.
2. It's useful for working with a partner, to make sure you're “on the same page” (meaning you agree about what you plan to write about).

STEP 1:

Start by writing a **Topic Sentence**, such as for example:

Topic Sentence: There are three ways that fried chicken restaurants can disappoint us.

STEP 2:

Next, write a **Concluding Sentence** that restates or rephrases the ideas in the **Topic Sentence**. For example:

Concluding Sentence: In all these ways, fried chicken can be really disappointing.

STEP 3:

Now, pause to compare your Topic Sentence and Concluding Sentence. You should find some repeating **keywords**.

Topic Sentence: There are three **ways** that **fried chicken restaurants** can **disappoint** us.

Concluding Sentence: In all these **ways**, **fried chicken** can be really **disappointing**.

We can see the repeating keywords or key ideas: “ways” “fried chicken [restaurants], and “disappoint.” To help make our skeleton better, we can reuse them throughout the paragraph skeleton.

STEP 4:

Now, add (probably 3) **Primary Supporting Sentences** in the “body” of the paragraph, and make sure they use key words/concepts too. We can see that the body of our paragraph should offer “three ways” these restaurants can disappoint us, so:

Topic Sentence: There are three **ways** that **fried chicken restaurants** can **disappoint** us.

Primary Supporting Sentence 1: The first **way** that **fried chicken shops** can **disappoint** us is when the chicken **tastes bad**.

Primary Supporting Sentence 2: The next **way** that **fried chicken shops** disappoint people is because often we **feel guilt after eating unhealthy food like fried chicken**.

Primary Supporting Sentence 3: The last **way** we can **be disappointed by fried chicken shops** is when we experience **bad service** from the restaurant staff.

Concluding Sentence: In all these **ways**, **fried chicken** can be really **disappointing**.

Above, you can see the red is used for the keywords that repeat from the **Topic Sentence**. In comparison, I'm using blue to highlight the new idea introduced in each **Primary Supporting Sentence**.

Since the paragraph is introducing “ways” that fried chicken restaurants disappoint us, each **Primary Supporting Sentence** introduces a different way that this happens.

STEP 5:

We need to add some **Secondary Supporting Sentences** after each **Primary Supporting Sentence**. These new sentences will explain, prove, or explore the new (“blue”) idea introduced in the **Primary Supporting Sentence** they follow. We can find out what information is needed here by asking follow-up questions for each **Primary Supporting Sentence**. For example:

Primary Supporting Sentence 1: The first **way** that **fried chicken shops** can **disappoint** us is when the chicken **tastes bad**.

- In what ways could it taste bad?
- Why does fried chicken sometimes taste bad?
- How frequent is this problem?
- ???

Exercise: Create a list of appropriate follow-up questions for **Primary Supporting Sentences 2–3** above.

STEP 6:

Build **Secondary Supporting Sentences** that answer the follow-up questions you have written. Try to answer most of the obvious questions a reader might wonder about or ask, using a logical order. (You can fix this later if it's a bit mixed up.)

STEP 7:

All done? Not quite! Don't forget to format it! You need to:

- delete the sentence labels (“**Primary Supporting Sentence:**”, etc.) and all the unnecessary line breaks
- change the color of the text in the final paragraph to all black, 12 point font
- remove bold text formatting (except maybe in the title).
- make sure your paragraph is **indented** (using the TAB key),
- check for a **title and byline**, and put the standard information in the **header**.

Then you're finished!