

# Creating a Clear Central Idea: Paragraph Unity

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraphs need unity. There should be only one topic. Any sentence dealing with a different topic should be moved to another paragraph or removed altogether.

Which sentence in the following paragraph doesn't belong?

In weekdays I arrive home at five o'clock and I have lunch. Then I do my homework and go to bed. I had a computer but now it doesn't work.

To determine whether a sentence belongs in a paragraph or not, follow these simple steps:

1. Read the paragraph and decide what the main idea—the topic—of the paragraph is.
2. Reread the paragraph. With each sentence, ask, "Is this about the topic of the paragraph?" If not, it needs to go.

Let's do that with our example paragraph.

Topic of paragraph \_\_\_\_\_  
Irrelevant sentences \_\_\_\_\_  
How they are irrelevant \_\_\_\_\_

*In the following short paragraphs, write the number of the sentences that disrupt the paragraph's unity.*

## How to Prevent Cheating

(1) Teachers should take steps to prevent students from cheating on exams. (2) To begin with, teachers should stop reusing old tests. (3) Even a test that has been used once is soon known on the student grapevine. (4) Students will check with their friends to find out, for example, what was on Dr. Thompson's biology final last term. (5) They may even manage to turn up a copy of the test itself, "accidentally" not turned in by a former student of Dr. Thompson's. (6) Teachers should also take some common sense precautions at test time. (7) They should make students separate themselves—by at least one seat—during an exam, and they should watch the class closely. (8) The best place for the teacher to sit is in the rear of the room, so that a student is never sure if the teacher is looking at him or her. (9) Last of all, teachers must make it clear to students that there will be stiff penalties for cheating. (10) One of the problems with our school systems is a lack of discipline. (11) Teachers never used to give in to students' demands or put up with bad behavior, as they do today. (12) Anyone caught cheating should immediately receive a zero for the exam. (13) A person even suspected of cheating should be forced to take an alternative exam in the teacher's office. (14) Because cheating is unfair to honest students, it should not be tolerated.

Topic of paragraph \_\_\_\_\_  
Irrelevant sentences \_\_\_\_\_  
How they are irrelevant \_\_\_\_\_

## A Dangerous Cook

(1) When my friend Tom sets to work in the kitchen, disaster often results. (2) Once he tried to make toasted cheese sandwiches for us by putting slices of cheese in the toaster along with the bread; he ruined the toaster. (3) Unfortunately, the toaster was a fairly new one that I had just bought for him three weeks before, on his birthday. (4) On another occasion, he had cut up some fresh beans and put them in a pot to steam. (5) I was really looking forward to the beans, for I eat nothing but canned vegetables in my dormitory. (6) I, frankly, am not much of a cook either. (7) The water in the Teflon pan steamed away while Tom was on the telephone, and both the beans and the Teflon coating in the pan were ruined. (8) Finally, another time Tom made spaghetti for us, and the noodles stuck so tightly together that we had to cut off slices with a knife and fork. (9) In addition, The meatballs were burned on the outside but almost raw on the inside. (10) The tomato sauce, on the other hand, turned out well. (11) For some reason, Tom is very good at making meat and vegetables sauces. (12) Because of Tom's kitchen mishaps, I never eat at his place

without an Alka-Seltzer in my pocket, or without money, in case we have to go out to eat.

Topic of paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Irrelevant sentences \_\_\_\_\_

How they are irrelevant \_\_\_\_\_

## Why Adults Visit Amusement Parks

(1) Adults visit amusement parks for several reasons. (2) For one thing, an amusement park is a place where it is acceptable to "pig-out" on junk food. (3) At the park, everyone is drinking soda and eating popcorn, ice-cream, or hot dogs. (4) No one seems to be on a diet, and so buying all the junk food you can eat is a guilt-free experience. (5) Parks should provide stands where healthier food, such as salads or cold chicken, would be sold. (6) Another reason people visit amusement parks is to prove themselves. (7) They want to visit the park that has the newest, scariest ride in order to say that they went on the Parachute Drop, the seven-story Elevator, the Water Chute, or the Death Slide. (8) Going on a scary ride is a way to feel courageous and adventurous without taking much of a risk. (9) Some rides, however, can be dangerous. (10) Rides that are not properly inspected or maintained have killed people all over the country. (11) A final reason people visit amusement parks is to escape from everyday pressures. (12) When people are poised at the top of a gigantic roller coaster, they are not thinking of bills, work, or personal problems. (13) A scary ride empties the mind of all worries--except making it to the bottom alive. (14) Adults at an amusement park may claim they have come for their children, but they are there for themselves as well.

Topic of paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Irrelevant sentences \_\_\_\_\_

How they are irrelevant \_\_\_\_\_

## My Color Television

(1) My color television has given me nothing but heartburn. (2) I was able to buy it a little over a year ago because I had my relatives give me money for my birthday instead of clothes that wouldn't fit. (3) My first dose of stomach acid came when I bought the set. (4) I let a salesclerk fool me into buying a discontinued model. (5) I realized this a day later when I saw newspaper advertisements for the set at seventy-five dollars less than I had paid. (6) The set worked so beautifully when I got it home that I would keep it on until stations signed off for the night. (7) Fortunately, I didn't get any channels showing all-night movies, or I would never have gotten to bed. (8) Then I started developing a problem with the set that involved static noise. (9) For some reason, when certain shows switched into a commercial, a loud buzz would sound for a few seconds. (10) Gradually, this sound began to appear during a show, and to get rid of it, I had to click the dial to another channel and click it back. (11) Sometimes this technique would not work, and I had to pick up the set and shake it to remove the buzzing sound. (12) I actually began to build up my arm muscles shaking my set; I could feel the new muscles working whenever I shot a basketball. (13) When neither of these methods removed the static noise, I would sit popping Tums and wait for the sound to go away. (14) Eventually I wound up slamming the set with my hand again, and it stopped working altogether. (15) My trip to the repair shop cost me \$62. (16) The set is working well now, but I keep expecting more trouble.

Topic of paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Irrelevant sentences \_\_\_\_\_

How they are irrelevant \_\_\_\_\_

## Source

The Hunter College Reading/Writing Center (<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/eva-b.html>)