



Outlining a Multi-point Paragraph

There are many ways to organize academic paragraphs. This handout is about one of the most basic, the multi-point paragraph. The Learning Centre also has handouts on other kinds of paragraph organization.

In a multi-point paragraph, the topic sentence (main idea) is supported by a number of main points. Each new point is often introduced with a transition like “first,” “second” or “third.” Specific evidence and explanation are provided for each main point.

An Example of a Multi-Point Paragraph

This simple example of a multi-point paragraph shows how such a paragraph is often organized.

The Learning Centre is a busy place. One reason is that many students come to the Learning Centre to get tutoring help. They come for help with writing, study skills, math and course concepts. Often there are three to five tutoring pairs working together in the Learning Centre at any one time. Another reason the Learning Centre is so busy is that many students like to use its ten computers. They write papers, do research, check their email and use WebCT. So many people want to use the computers that there are often people standing around and waiting for a free computer. Finally, the reception desk is often busy. People come to the desk to make and change appointments, to ask for resources and to ask for information about the Learning Centre. People often have to line up to get help at the reception desk, especially when classes have just ended. Taken together, then, the tutoring, the computers and the reception desk all contribute to making the Learning Centre a very active place.

Answer these questions about the example paragraph:

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph?
2. How many points are used to support that main idea?
3. Underline the transitions used to show the reader that a new main point is being introduced.
4. What facts are used to support the points?

Parts of a Multi-Point Paragraph

The chart below discusses the various parts of a multipoint paragraph and how they relate to the Example Paragraph on page 1.

Part of the Paragraph	Description	Example
Topic Sentence	The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence has two parts: the topic (what the paragraph is about) and the controlling idea (what you have to say about the topic). The topic sentence is usually the first or second sentence in a paragraph.	In the example paragraph: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The topic is the Learning Centre.• The controlling idea is that it is busy.
Main Points	The main points explain why you believe the topic sentence is true. Most often there are 2 to 4 parallel points such as a number of reasons, a number of similarities, a number of categories or a number of steps in a process.	In the example: Three main points show the different ways in which the Learning Centre is busy. The main point sentences identify the things that make the Learning Centre a busy place: tutoring, computers and reception. Each activity is discussed separately.
Evidence and Explanation	The support for each main point is the evidence and explanation. The evidence might include facts, statistics, quotations, anecdotes, logical argument, examples, elaboration, description or definition. For a research paper, the evidence generally comes from research sources. The second part of giving support – explanation – is crucial because the reader needs to be told how the evidence supports the point that the writer is making. The purpose of the evidence and explanation is to prove the truth of the main point.	In the example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each point has evidence which describes activities that go on in the Learning Centre. These are facts: e.g. facts about skills tutored.• The explanation shows how those activities connect to the idea of the busyness of the Learning Centre: e.g. how many people get tutoring at a time connects the tutoring activity to the idea of busyness.
Concluding Sentence	The concluding sentence restates the topic sentence, using different words. For long paragraphs, it may also restate the main points in the paragraph. The concluding sentence is not always included, especially when the paragraph is part of a longer piece of writing.	In the example: The concluding sentence summarizes the main supporting points and restates the topic sentence. Because this is not a long paragraph, restating the points is too repetitive. It is included here as an example in case you are writing a longer paragraph.

Planning a Multi-Point Paragraph

A good way to plan a multi-point paragraph is to make an outline. This helps you to focus on which points to use, what evidence you have and how you can explain the connection between the evidence and the points you are making. Once you are satisfied with the organization of the outline, use it as a guide to write your paragraph.

An Outline for the Paragraph

This is the outline made before writing the example paragraph. Notice that the ideas changed slightly when it was written into paragraph form.

Topic Sentence: The Learning Centre is a busy place.

Main Point 1: Many students come to get tutoring help.

Evidence and Explanation:

- help with writing, study skills, math, course concepts.
- usually 3-5 tutoring pairs working in the LC so busy.

Main Point 2: Many students want to use the computers.

Evidence and Explanation:

- write papers, do research, email, use WebCT.
- often all computers full; students wait for a free computer.

Main Point 3: Lots of people come to the reception desk.

Evidence and Explanation:

- make and change appointments; get information.
- especially between classes; often line-ups.

Now try making an outline on a topic of your own on the next page.

For more help with planning and writing paragraphs, please see Learning Centre handouts:

WR3.10 Paragraphs Using Quotations.

WR2.54 Making an Outline from the Top Down

Multi-Point Paragraph Outline

Topic Sentence: _____

Main Point 1: _____

Evidence and Explanation: _____

Main Point 2: _____

Evidence and Explanation: _____

Main Point 3: _____

Evidence and Explanation: _____

Main Point 4: _____

Evidence and Explanation: _____
