



## *Before Papers Come Paragraphs*

### Unit 2: One Perfect Paragraph:

#### Lesson 10: Paragraphs Have Legs—Supporting Statements

*The Denim Beret:*  
a writing school  
for teens

Supplies: lesson 10 worksheet; graded lesson 9 worksheet

Goal: to master the skill of using supporting statements to develop the main idea.

Suggested Time: 2 sessions

Resource credits: *Step Up to Writing*, by Maureen Auman

## SESSION 1

### Warm-up:

Choose a warm-up and begin! Remember to set your time for 10 minutes and write non-stop. If you want to continue after the timer goes off, keep writing. If you want to stop before 10 minutes is up, challenge yourself to find more to say by expanding your thinking on the topic and looking for more details to include.

1. Freewrite: Remember one rule—just write without stopping to think until your time is up. Let your mind and hand relax. Nonsense is okay; self-censoring is not.
2. Choose a subject/topic of interest to you and write about it. Don't worry about making it a "complete" essay or even a neat and logical one. Just stay on the topic and explore.
3. Respond to the following prompt: What work of art (music, drama, painting, dance, etc.) is meaningful to you and why?

### Introduction

If you have something to say, whether in speaking or in writing, you are usually not going to want to stop at one sentence. The topic sentence in writing is called that because it presents the topic of the paragraph, as well as the *main idea* of the paragraph. It carries the basic thrust of your thoughts, but it is also the launching pad into the next part of your paragraph, which I'll

often call the “green” (see the “Rainbow Diagram” from lesson 9). In the “green” section of your paragraph it is time to slow down and discuss your main idea, to give it substance and to explore it further. This is called adding “supporting statements” or “supporting ideas.”

## Lesson, part 1: Understanding Supporting Statements

The good news about the “greens” is that they are often the easiest part of the paragraph to write. In your prewriting you planned at least a rough sketch of what you want to say, and you began your paragraph with the topic sentence. This means that you just need to expand on that now by explaining or discussing it. If what you want to get across to your readers is clear in your mind, you might find this easy. If not, you may want to work on your prewriting a little more. Let’s talk about how supporting statements work, though.

Perhaps you want to write a short essay on the topic, “my close friends.” Your topic sentence might look something like this:

*I have three close friends, who couldn’t be more different from each other.*

What kind of supporting statements (green) should you add to this sentence to expand or explain it? Easy! Your topic sentence is a Power statement. It sets up your paragraph to be a description of your three friends with an emphasis on the ways in which they are different from each other—like this:

*Kelly is sassy and crazy and can’t sit still for a minute. Jessica is quiet and always has to be pulled away from a book. Then there is Samantha, who is always acting like the circus clown she dreams of becoming someday.*

Using the same topic of “my close friends,” your topic sentence could also read something like this Occasion/position statement:

*Whether my friends are laughing or arguing with each other, we’re always ready to help each other out of any scrape.*

Notice that now you have set your paragraph up to discuss a different angle on friendship—not a description of your friends, like the previous topic sentence, but instead a discussion of your care for one another. In this case, you need supporting statements that show how this topic sentence is true. Perhaps you might say something like this:

*One time, for example, Jessica was mad at Kelly for embarrassing her in public, but she helped Kelly study for a difficult science test anyway. Another time, Samantha accidentally broke her mother’s new lamp, and I helped her explain what happened.*

The most important thing you must notice in both of these examples is that every supporting statement points straight back to the topic sentence. This is crucial to building a clear, orderly structure into your paragraph. In fact, it is so important that I am going to say it again as a rule:

**Every supporting statement must point straight back to the topic sentence.**

In other words, your supporting statements cannot digress into a new topic or even a closely related topic; nor can they give details about a previous supporting statement. They must speak only and specifically about the idea you present in your topic sentence. This is because the idea in your topic sentence is what your readers expect you to discuss in the sentences to come. In a way, you have made a subtle promise to your readers, and you must deliver on your promise in the rest of your paragraph. Surprises can be fun, but they aren't for readers who are trying to follow your train of thought. If you diverge from the idea you've expressed in your topic sentence, your essay will be confusing, not interesting or informative.

## Lesson, part 2: Different Shades of "Green"

Perhaps you are worried about what to say, though, even though you've done some prewriting. Sure, you know your topic sentence has set your readers up for, say, three specific points you should discuss (i.e., *There are three reasons I like math.*), but what exactly should those three points be? Or maybe your topic sentence has set your readers up for a description of your opinion of the most beautiful place on earth (i.e., *The Cotswolds region in England is one of the most beautiful places on earth.*), and you aren't sure how to paint a vivid picture of it in their minds.

If you encounter this problem while you're writing your paragraph, then you should go back to prewriting and brainstorm for ideas. There is, however, an easy acronym to memorize that can help you get your thoughts in order: "R-D-F," which stands for "reasons-details-facts." These are the kinds of statements that make up the "green" portion of your paragraph.

When you get stuck, consider whether you need a reason, detail, or fact to help explain your topic sentence. In the above example about the friends, I used *details* to show how the friends related to each other. If you are writing about the feeding habits of sharks, however, you will likely need to write down *facts* to explain your topic sentence. On the other hand, if you are explaining why it is important to get good grades in school, then *reasons* will be important to your reader.

Let's look at some more examples from real authors. I have colored them according to the Rainbow Diagram to distinguish the topic sentence from the supporting statements:

***End of Sample***