

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

TEACHER NOTES

Age: Late teenager/Adult
Level: Intermediate (B1)
Time: 60 minutes
Focus: Writing
Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student
Overall Aims: In this lesson, students will:

1. develop an awareness of paragraph development in English;
2. write a paragraph following the conventions of English academic writing.

students improve their abilities, support is gradually removed and students can act with more freedom. Exercise 1 here is the most structured/controlled task: students read a paragraph and identify its main idea. Exercise 2 moves a step further, asking them to identify the function of highlighted sentences from the same paragraph. Exercise 3 asks the students to analyze another paragraph, looking for its main idea, major and minor supports. Finally, they are expected to write a paragraph themselves.

ACADEMIC WRITING



TEACHING TIP: Writing well in a foreign language requires more than grammatical knowledge. Some students may produce error-free sentences, which nonetheless sound awkward when put together in a paragraph in English. Most non-English-speaking students benefit from a short but overt explanation of discourse differences between English and their own language (discourse is any piece of extended language, as defined by the British Council). To illustrate, English paragraphs have a preference for the main idea being given first and supporting detail to follow, while other languages may have a preference for the opposite. Students write better texts when they understand that there simply are different expectations in different languages. If you wish, you may ask your students to compare and contrast the English paragraphs in this lesson with one written in their native tongue and to share their findings with their classmates.

1. Distribute the worksheet and start with Exercise 1.

Answer:

In order for a town or city to become a Cittaslow, there are some criteria they need to fulfil.

2. After you elicit the main idea, move on to giving students information about topic sentence, major and minor supports. Make sure you mention that, as a general rule, there are at least two major supports in a well-developed paragraph. Each major support may have more than one minor support. It is these minor supports that make a paragraph rich and interesting.
3. Get the students to do Exercise 2. Check the answers.

Answers:

First, the population of the town needs to be fewer than 50,000: Major support

Of course, it is not enough to eat locally-grown foods; these should be organic too: Minor support

In other words, people should look after old and traditional buildings: Minor support

Another criterion is that pollution should be prevented and air quality should be improved: Major support

Last but not least, slow cities should of course encourage slow food restaurants: Major support

THE ANATOMY OF A PARAGRAPH

Aims: to familiarize students with the components of English paragraphs

Approximate time: 15 mins

PROCEDURE:



TEACHING TIP: This part of the lesson uses scaffolding. Scaffolding is a teaching technique that involves providing students with gradually decreasing support as they complete a series of tasks. As the

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

TEACHER NOTES

DEVELOPING YOUR PARAGRAPH THROUGH ENUMERATION

Aims: to familiarize students with the technique of enumeration; to get students to write an enumeration paragraph in groups (thus recycling the information about teamwork and collaboration from Lesson 3)

Approximate time: 45 mins

PROCEDURE:

- As with the previous section, go over the information about enumeration.
- Get the students to complete Exercise 3. (These two steps should take around 15 minutes.)

Answers:

Topic sentence: *Organic dark chocolate is a superfood with many health benefits.*

Major Support 1: *To start with, it is full of antioxidants that slow the aging process and fight with diseases.*

Major Support 2: *Second, it is full of micronutrients such as potassium, magnesium and iron.*

Minor Support: *The human body needs these to function properly.*

Major Support 3: *As a third benefit, dark chocolate increases blood flow to the brain and to the heart, improving both brain and heart function.*

Major Support 4: *Finally, dark chocolate also helps against stress.*

Minor Support: *It reduces stress hormone levels and balances your mood at times of anxiety.*

Concluding Sentence: *Next time you go shopping, do yourself a favour and reach for a bar of organic dark chocolate.*

Transitions: *To start with, Second, As a third benefit, Finally*

- Set up the group writing activity. As a general rule, groups of 3 or 4 work well in writing activities. First, ask the groups to read through Dean Harry R. Lewis' letter to Harvard students and complete the chart as they do so. Check their answers before they move on to the writing activity (this step should take around 15 minutes).

Possible Answers:

#	Major advice	Minor details, examples
1	<i>Don't do too much academic planning.</i>	<i>Be flexible and expect changes.</i>
2	<i>Don't resist taking time off from your studies if you feel the need.</i>	<i>Foreign travel, an internship, etc may set you back on track.</i>
3	<i>Don't ignore your physical and emotional health.</i>	<i>You need to relax to perform well academically.</i>
4	<i>Don't expect yourself to be perfect.</i>	<i>Make sure you enjoy the experience too.</i>
5	<i>Don't see this advice as rules that you must follow.</i>	<i>It is essential to know and understand yourself.</i>

TEACHING TIP: The instructions ask students to use their own words while completing the chart. This is a good opportunity to teach them about paraphrasing and plagiarism. If the chart uses their own words, their paragraphs will likely do so, too.

- Tell the groups to turn their chart into a well-written enumeration paragraph. You may want to remind them of the rules for effective teamwork and collaboration from Lesson 3 (the actual writing activity should take around 15 minutes. In weaker classes, the previous steps may take longer and the actual writing activity may be assigned as homework).

LESSON 4 WORD LIST:

This lesson only includes a list of words that appear at some point in the lesson and in Coxhead's Academic Word List. These are frequent in English medium classes at university and your students may already be familiar with some of them. My suggestion is to foster ownership of learning by giving the students the responsibility to learn/review these words on their own. For classroom practice or home study, a short set of vocabulary exercises follows each word list.

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

TEACHER NOTES

Academic Vocabulary Exercises:

Answers:

A.

1. to
2. to
3. to
4. on

B.

1. specific
2. flexible
3. previous
4. approximate

C.

1. *The availability of the course depends on having enough students.*
2. *Flexibility is crucial to succeed at university.*
3. *Was it easy to adapt to your new school? / Did you adapt to your new school easily?*
4. *Did you receive a response to your email to the International Student Office?*

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHEET

THE ANATOMY OF A PARAGRAPH

Exercise 1

Here is a paragraph from the reading text in Lesson 1, *Cittaslow: Life in the Slow Lane*. Can you identify the main idea of this paragraph?

In order for a town or city to become a Cittaslow, there are some criteria they need to fulfil. First, the population of the town needs to be fewer than 50,000. Obviously, a large metropolis cannot become a slow city. Secondly, people should use local products. Slow cities do not transport their food and products from the other side of the country. Of course, it is not enough to eat locally-grown foods; these should be organic too. Thirdly, traditional architecture should be protected. In other words, people should look after old and traditional buildings. Next, traditional arts and crafts should be encouraged. These should be displayed and sold in small shops. Another criterion is that pollution should be prevented and air quality should be improved. This is done through reducing traffic and using alternative energy sources. Last but not least, slow cities should of course encourage slow food restaurants.

A paragraph is a group of sentences that develops **one main idea**. This idea is given in a sentence called the **topic sentence**. In academic writing, the topic sentence is at the beginning of a paragraph, usually the **first sentence**. This sentence includes an opinion, not a fact, and it cannot be a question.

The sentences that come after the topic sentence are the **supporting details**. There are two types of supporting details: **Major supports** are bigger ideas that directly support the topic sentence. **Minor supports** are smaller ideas that give an example, detail, statistic, or explanation.

Here is what a paragraph looks like:

TOPIC SENTENCE

Major Support 1

Minor Support(s)

Major Support 2

Minor Support(s)

Exercise 2

Now let's see this in action. You have already identified the main idea of the following paragraph in Exercise 1. Now look at the highlighted sentences and decide whether they are major or minor supports:

In order for a town or city to become a Cittaslow, there are some criteria they need to fulfil. First, the population of the town needs to be fewer than 50,000. Obviously, a large metropolis cannot become a slow city. Secondly, people should use local products. Slow cities do not transport their food and products from the other side of the country. Of course, it is not enough to eat locally-grown foods; these should be organic too. Thirdly, traditional architecture should be protected. In other words, people should look after old and traditional buildings. Next, traditional arts and crafts should be encouraged. These should be displayed and sold in small shops. Another criterion is that pollution should be prevented and air quality should be improved. This is done through reducing traffic and using alternative energy sources. Last but not least, slow cities should of course encourage slow food restaurants.

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHEET

DEVELOPING YOUR PARAGRAPH THROUGH ENUMERATION

As you now know, paragraphs consist of a **main idea** and **supporting details**. On the previous page, you practised finding the topic sentence of a paragraph. It was:

In order for a town or city to become a Cittaslow, there are some criteria they need to fulfil.

This sentence signals that a list is coming. This technique is called **enumeration**. The term enumeration means 'listing' and is borrowed from mathematics. It is a powerful academic writing tool.

How to Write A Paragraph with Enumeration

1. Start your paragraph with a topic sentence.
2. Include a quantifier such as *a few*, *several*, *many* or a specific number in your topic sentence.
3. Continue with supporting details.
4. List the supporting details by using transitions such as the following:

First, ...	Next,
To begin with ...	Finally, ...
Second, ...	The final / The last, ...
Third, ...	

Exercise 3

1. **Read the paragraph below and:**
 - Underline the topic sentence.
 - Circle the transitions showing enumeration.
 - Distinguish major and minor supports.

Organic dark chocolate is a superfood with many health benefits. To start with, it is full of antioxidants that slow the aging process and fight with diseases. Second, it is full of micronutrients such as potassium, magnesium and iron. The human body needs these to function properly. As a third benefit, dark chocolate increases blood flow to the brain and to the heart, improving both brain and heart function. Finally, dark chocolate also helps against stress. It reduces stress hormone levels and balances your mood at times of anxiety. Next time you go shopping, do yourself a favour and reach for a bar of organic dark chocolate.

2. You will now work in teams to write an enumeration paragraph. First, read the letter from Dr Lewis (Dean of Harvard College) to new students at Harvard. As you read, complete the following chart with information from the letter. Use your own words. The first one has been done for you.

#	Major advice	Minor details, examples
1	Don't do too much academic planning.	Be flexible and expect changes.
2		
3		
4		
5		

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHEET

(This is an adapted version of the letter written by Dean Harry R. Lewis. The original letter is available at: <http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/harrylewis/files/slowdown2004.pdf>)

Harry R. Lewis
Professor of Computer Science
Dean of Harvard College

SLOW DOWN Getting More out of Harvard by Doing Less

Dear Harvard student,

Students arriving at Harvard have excellent academic and nonacademic skills. We hope that you will continue your success and your ability to balance your activities here on Harvard campus. You will find that Harvard offers you many activities and a lively life to adapt to. Choose a few activities that you really love. Remember that you will have a more balanced life if you join in fun activities. The relationships you form with your friends may have a stronger influence on your life than some of your courses.

This letter offers suggestions about how to get the most out of Harvard.

- Don't decide on every detail of your academic program from the start. You should, of course, do some planning, learn about the courses, read the Handbook for Students. But you don't need to choose the courses you will take during your third year. Your interests change, new courses appear, existing courses are removed from the catalog. You should be flexible to respond to these changes.
- Don't think you're doing something wrong if you take a year off from Harvard before you graduate. If your motivation is down or your grades are not what they should be, take some time off to refresh yourself and get your focus back. Foreign study, an internship or field work is a wonderful opportunity. It gives you a new perspective, benefits you intellectually and broadens your horizons.
- Don't ignore your physical and emotional health. Your mind and body will break down if you don't relax, exercise, eat well, and sleep. Give yourself a break — go to an athletic event, a movie, a theatrical production on campus, a rock concert. Sit outside and read a novel, go to a place of worship, find a pleasant place where you can be alone with your thoughts. Hang out with your friends, play frisbee. It will help your academic performance.
- Don't expect yourself to be perfect. You've already accomplished a lot by arriving here. Find courses and activities that make you happy and don't be hard on yourself if you are not the best at them. Enjoy your experience here with the people who are here with you.
- Finally, don't see my advice as rules you must follow! It is important to understand what you want, to let yourself discover your own loves and your own ambitions.

It's your life, even at Harvard. Enjoy it.

Harry R. Lewis
Dean of Harvard College

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHEET

What were Dr Lewis' suggestions to new students at Harvard? Together with your team, write a paragraph answering this question. The chart is your outline (= plan).

Start with the topic sentence given below. Follow this sentence with major and minor supports from the chart. Remember to use transitions that signal enumeration. Write approximately 150 words.

As you work in your team, remember the rules for effective teamwork:

Have a common goal!

Be organized!

Make equal effort!

Show respect!

Dr Lewis makes five suggestions for new students at Harvard University.

LESSON 4: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHEET

LESSON 4 WORD LIST

Academic Words				
adapt (to)	flexible	perspective	specific	version
approximately	function	previous	statistic	
available	minor	respond (to)	technique	

In this lesson, you encountered the Academic Words above. These are frequent in academic life. Here are some exercises with them:

Academic Vocabulary Exercises

A. Complete the sentences below by using the right preposition.

- Are these documents available _____ the public?
- Participation in social activities helps students adapt _____ their new life on campus.
- Most universities try to respond _____ such social demands.
- Through education we can develop a new perspective _____ life.

B. Use the adjectives below to complete the sentences:

flexible specific previous approximate

- The teacher has _____ requirements for the next assignment: maximum 500 words, double-spaced, font style Times New Roman and font size 12.
- Dr Stevenson is extremely strict with deadlines. He's not _____ at all.
- The courses I took in _____ years were mostly theoretical. This year's courses, on the other hand, all seem to be hands-on.
- The _____ number of students in my school is 800.

C. Paraphrase (rewrite) the following sentences by replacing the underlined word with the one in brackets. Do not change the meaning of the sentence. Change the grammar where necessary:

- The course will only be available if there are enough students.
(availability) _____
- It is crucial to be flexible to succeed at university.
(flexibility) _____
- Was your adaptation to your new school easy?
(adapt) _____
- Did the International Student Office respond to your email?
(response) _____