

# The Writing Lab

## Paragraphs: PIE

Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

The Point Illustrate Explain (**PIE**) model for body paragraphs requires that each paragraph consists of the three parts as described below.

### **P = Point**

Each paragraph should begin with the point it wishes to make in a clear topic sentence. Work to make your "point" an argument, something that needs to be supported or illustrated with specific evidence or details. Further, make sure your "point" is directly related to your document's overall thesis statement or purpose.

### **I = Illustrate**

Following the point, we should get immediate evidence (examples, statistics, quotations, anecdotes) to illustrate or defend the point you just stated. The amount of evidence depends upon the nature of the paragraph. If you are trying to establish that a pattern exists, you may need several examples and illustrations. However, if you are trying to provide a focused and systematic look at a single idea, rather than establish a pattern, one well developed and detailed example may suffice.

### **E = Explain**

Following your evidence, you need to provide some sort of explanation or further discussion of your ideas and how they support your document's overall thesis statement. You need to establish a direct connection between your paragraph and your thesis statement.

### **A Note about Transitions:**

Once you have one paragraph written, you need to think about how to connect that paragraph to the one that comes next. One way to connect paragraphs is by using transitional words (next, therefore, additionally, for example, on the other hand). A second way to connect paragraphs is by repeating the concept of the last paragraph as you go into the new paragraph. Here is an example: In addition to avoiding high monthly rent payments [**topic of last paragraph**], another reason to purchase a new home is to begin building equity [**topic of new paragraph**].

### **Notes**

1. There is no one ideal length for an academic paragraph. Indeed, the occasional short paragraph can add drama to a text. However, academic paragraphs tend to run 10-14 sentences. If your paragraphs are consistently short, you are most likely not covering information in much depth. If your paragraphs are consistently long (over one typed page of text), you may be trying to cover too much information in a single paragraph, and this is very taxing on readers.
2. Remember that when readers begin a new paragraph, they expect the paragraph to be about a new topic. Therefore, the best place to put a transition is at the *beginning of the new paragraph* because that is when readers are prepared for a change in the discussion. Avoid putting a transition at the end of the old paragraph because readers are not expecting a change in topic yet.

In the three examples on the next page, topic sentences are underlined and **transitions** are in bold.

### Example One: Transitions Indicating a Series

The toys I played with as a child can be classified in three ways: unwanted educational toys, unsafe toys, and sex-role toys. **The first group** of toys involved those boring, educational, arts and crafts toys that everyone thought I wanted. These were the toys that were designed to both teach me something AND keep me out of mischief. **For example**, how many stupid hot pad kits, hook rug kits, paint-by-number kits, pompom kits, quilting kits, knitting kits, crochet kits, macramé kits, butterfly kits, ant farm kits, and lightning bug kits can one child use up in a lifetime? Interestingly, it was always my most boring and unimaginative relatives who showed up with these kinds of gifts. **However**, as an adult on the gift-giving end of things, I now see that these gifts were highly valuable because they forced me to use my own imagination. At the time though, these educational toys bored me out of my mind.

As every child knows, however, it isn't the educational toys but the unsafe toys that make the hearts of children beat faster. **Some of the unsafe** (but fun) toys I had as a child were Shrinky Dinks, plastic objects that you *would bake* in the oven -- just think of the toxic fumes. **Another** incredible toy was called clackers. Clackers were glass spheres about 1.5 inches in diameter that were on a long string. I would swing the spheres/string around until the glass balls would crash or "clack" together; just think of the eye injuries. **And finally**, there were lawn jarts, giant darts that a child would hurl into the air and hope they didn't impale anyone on the way down. As an adult, I wouldn't want a child to be within a ten-foot radius of any of these toys now.

### Example Two: Transitions Indicating Time and Place

My "free" cat Rosie is beautiful but a real trouble maker at times. **For example**, when I first brought her home, I was in the shower one morning washing my hair. **In between** the water and the suds, I thought I saw something little and gray in my peripheral vision. Little did I know that my kitten, all five pounds of her, had climbed the shower curtain and was dangling over the top of the shower ready to bop me on the head. **As I screamed** (hey, I saw Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*), Rosie flew off the shower curtain into a little shelf unit in my bathroom. **On her way down**, she managed to knock over about six different glass objects, only breaking four of them. **As I stood** in the shower, soap in my eyes, adrenaline coursing through my veins, and broken glass everywhere, I figured that this "free kitten" I had just adopted was going to *cost me* big time! Having never owned a cat before, I didn't know then what I know now: that a cat is never as happy as when it is causing drama in the life of its human being.

### Example Three: Transitions Indicating Location

With its mixture of delicacy and strength, my jewelry box is a study in contrasts. It is a rather small item, measuring only six inches long, four inches wide, three inches deep, and weighing only about a pound or so. **On its lid** is a single rose bud about the size of my thumbnail, small and fragile, with colors that have faded long ago, leaving only a dried gray-green stem and petals tinged the color of blood. **As I open the box** using a thin and flimsy metal hinge that is hanging precariously, I find that the inside is designed like a fancy theater. **Inside and on stage**, I find a slender ballerina rides a horse, her arms, like tiny match sticks, raised above her head as if she is trying to gain her balance. **Below her**, where the audience would sit, are more dried rose petals reminding me of discarded pistachio shells, thin as antique paper, dry and rough to the touch. They crunch and crackle when they are mixed up with the fingers. **Hidden in** the pile of petals, smelling of paint and dust and long-used up fragrance, are three more rosebuds, each one delicately still holding itself together but ready to disintegrate at the slightest touch. **Despite** the apparent fragility of this box, **however**, it is also strong and sturdy. **Enclosing** that dainty and dying rose on the lid of my jewelry box is an iron coffin, all rough edges, inexact corners, and cold metal. **Like** the artist who made this box, a woman who frightens some with her no-nonsense, tough-as-nails exterior, inside is a gentleness and a softness that few would notice unless they opened up the lid and looked.