

Supporting Details

An effective topic sentence starts your conversation with the reader, but it is up to you to continue the conversation by providing a clear, logical explanation of the main idea. Supporting details are specific statements that are related to the topic of the paragraph, but they do more than just restate the main idea.

1. **Supporting details are more than restatements of the topic sentence.** They provide reasons and examples that show why the main idea is true.

Example 1: Researchers have proven that smoking is bad for your health. Many researchers have determined smoking is unhealthy. In addition, researchers have publicized smoking's harmful components.

What's the problem with this paragraph?

Example 2: Researchers have proven that smoking is bad for your health. The American Medical Association has issued several warnings about the increased risk of lung cancer associated with smoking. In addition, the New England Journal of Medicine has issued its own separate findings verifying this same association.

How have they fixed it?

2. **Supporting details are related to the topic.** If the details digress from the topic, these unrelated ideas can weaken the coherence of the paragraph and confuse the reader.

Example 1: It is easy to learn a new language. Sometimes it's hard to find someone who speaks another language. It's also fun to learn martial arts. Sometimes I just can't learn how to memorize things.

What's the problem with this paragraph?

Example 2: It is easy to learn a new language. Right now, you can learn a language by taking an elective course in high school. Then, if you go to college you may have the opportunity to live in a foreign country as an exchange student. All along, you can join chat rooms on the Internet or conversation meetings in your area that will help you practice speaking your new language.

How have they fixed it?

3. **Supporting details are specific, not general, statements.** The topic sentence is a general statement, but you should explain in detail. Be specific as you can.

Example 1: Opinion polls question small samples of the population in order to indicate larger trends. An important part of polling is making sure that different kinds of people are represented.

Even though this country is made up of many different kinds of people, opinion polls are pretty accurate.

What's the problem with this paragraph?

Example 2: Opinion polls question small samples of the population in order to indicate larger trends. Pollsters must be careful to select people of different age, gender, occupation, location, and ethnic background. In this way, a sample of as few as 200 people can give a good indication of public opinion throughout the country. Despite the small sample, the margin of error is usually between four and six percent.

How have they fixed it?