THE PARAGRAPH

All games are governed by rules and regulations. Over years of usage, rules of conversation and writing have also been established. We are expected to follow these rules just as players are expected to abide by the rules and conventions of any game.

Most people pattern their speech and writing after rules, even though they may sometimes be unaware of actually following a “rule”. The rules of spoken language are automatic, and we do not notice their rigidity until we begin to write.

What is a sentence? A sentence (both in spoken and written language) is a group of words with a subject and a verb that expresses a complete thought. How do we automatically know when to begin a new sentence or when to bring a sentence to a conclusion? The rules are so deeply ingrained that we naturally speak in sentences.

A paragraph is composed of a group of sentences. We are all aware of this, but the important fact to remember in writing is that a paragraph is made up of sentences that deal with a single topic. It is a complete and closely-knit statement of some particular point.

A good paragraph is based upon a topic sentence. The paragraph is backed up with reasons or data to support the topic sentence. Be sure that all your sentences pertain to the topic--stay with the subject.

Notice how well the following paragraph is written. The first sentence (the topic sentence) attracts your attention and states what the paragraph will be about. The rest of the paragraph is an elaboration of the first statement: “Almost all tests have a time limit.”

Almost all tests have a time limit. Some tests are essentially power tests; that is, you will have a liberal amount of time to complete them. Other tests are essentially speed tests; that is, you will have to work quickly and make optimum use of your time if you desire to complete all the questions or do well. With all tests, you should be especially aware of the time allowed and remember to pace yourself accordingly.

When writing a paragraph, remember that the topic sentence is usually an abstraction; that is, it is an idea or an opinion that you assert. This abstraction must be supported by concrete examples of what you have seen or experienced.
**Abstract Topic Statement**

The menu here is boring.  
They serve the same dish at least three times weekly.

The shirt did not satisfy Tim.  
He could hardly fit into the small shirt.

**Concrete Supportive Statement**

The topic sentence is the axis or center of your paragraph.  The first sentence in a paragraph is usually the topic sentence, although some writers prefer to place it elsewhere in the paragraph.  Wherever it is placed, the topic sentence should give accurate and complete information.  The rest of the paragraph is an expansion of the idea that is contained in the topic sentence.

To learn how to write clear, concise paragraphs, practice by writing paragraphs about any opinion you have.  Back up your opinion with concrete statements.  List them before you begin to write.  Remember, your basic opinion is your topic sentence; your concrete statements will constitute the body of your paragraph.

Whatever your opinion, it will have to have some basis, some reason or reasons that caused you to arrive at that particular opinion.

Remember these three factors for good paragraph writing:

1. Observe--describe what you see.  Use details.
2. Select the correct word to express what you mean.  Be concrete; broad generalities are not meaningful to the reader.
3. Keep to the point.  A paragraph should be about one topic only.

Some Points to Consider in the Writing of a Paragraph:

1. Avoid the second person (“you”) unless your instructor allows its use.
2. Proofread carefully for sentence fragments and run-on sentences.
3. Be careful not to shift verb tenses.
4. Correct subject-verb agreement is important.
5. Do not omit end punctuation.
6. Capitalize carefully.  The dictionary can be a help.
7. Use the active voice wherever possible.
8. Do not be wordy.  Be careful about beginning sentences with the pronoun “it”.
9. If in doubt about the correct spelling of a word, look it up in the dictionary.
10. Choose topics that are appropriate to your age and experience.
11. Limit the topic.
12. Include a title.
13. The number of words for each paragraph should be 100 - 250.