

WHAT IS A SUPPORTING DETAIL? Once you have constructed a topic sentence made up of the topic and its controlling idea, you are ready to support your statement with details. The quality and number of these details will largely determine the effectiveness of the writing. You can hold your readers' attention with your choice of details, or you can lose your readers' interest because your details are not compelling.

A supporting detail is a piece of evidence used by a writer to make the controlling idea of the topic sentence convincing and interesting to the reader. A piece of evidence might be a descriptive image, an example taken from history or personal experience, a reason, a fact (such as a statistic), a quotation from an expert, or an anecdote used to illustrate a point.

Poor supporting details: Many people died of the flu in the 1960s. Effective supporting In 1968 in the United States, seventy thousand people died of the Hong Kong flu.

identifying supporting details • choosing supporting details based on the method • of paragraph development avoiding restatement of the topic sentence • making supporting details specific •

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

WORKING WITH PARAGRAPHS: SUPPORTING DETAILS To develop a paragraph successfully, you must use appropriate details to support the main idea of that paragraph. In this chapter, you will learn several skills related to the use of supporting details:

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HOW DO YOU CHOOSE SUPPORTING DETAILS? For a paragraph to be well developed, the main idea must be supported with several details. As you work through the chapters in this section, you will have opportunities to use many types of supporting details. The chart on this page lists the various methods of paragraph development. A writer chooses supporting details according to what best fits the method of development. For instance, if the writer is describing someone's appearance, the details are made up of sensory images (for example, a raspy voice, olive skin, and the scent of Old Spice cologne).

Methods of Paragraph Development

Narration: telling a story using a sequence of events Description: using sensory images to create a picture with words Process: using steps explaining how to do something or explaining how something works Illustration or example: giving instances of the main idea Comparison/contrast: showing similarities or differences Cause and effect: examining reasons or outcomes Extended definition: analyzing at some length the meaning of a word or concept Classification: dividing a subject into groups or parts

As you choose your supporting details, keep in mind that the readers do not necessarily have to agree with your point of view. However, your supporting details must be good enough to make your readers at least respect your attitude. Your goal should be to educate your readers. Try to give them some understanding of your subject. Don't assume they know about your topic or are interested in it. If you provide enough specific details, your readers will feel they have learned something new about the subject, and this alone is a satisfying experience for most people.

Effective supporting details will encourage readers to keep on reading. Such details will make your points more memorable, and they will give pleasure to those who are learning new material or picturing the images you have created. Read the following paragraph and observe how it provides effective details that support the controlling idea of the topic sentence.

Everyone has heard of surefire formulas to prevent getting a cold. Popular home methods include a cold shower, regular exercise, and a hot rum toddy. Some people swear by cod-liver oil, tea with honey, citrus fruit juices, or keeping one's feet dry. Americans spent billions last year for cold and cough remedies. Advertisers have claimed preventive and

Topic sentence

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Using the lines provided, copy the topic sentence from the previous paragraph. Then answer the questions about the details that support the topic sentence.

Topic sentence:

What are some examples of home remedies?

What are some examples of over-the-counter remedies?

What fact is given?

What expert is named? What is the statistic given by that source?

Practice

Everyone has heard of surefire formulas to prevent getting a cold.

a cold shower, exercise, hot rum toddy, cod-liver oil, tea with honey, citrus fruit juices, keeping one's feet dry

vitamins, alkalizers, lemon drinks, antihistamines, decongestants, timed-release capsules, antibiotics, antiseptic gargles, bioflavonoids, nose drops and sprays

Americans average two or three colds a year, each lasting about a week.

U.S. Public Health Service; 50 percent of the population experiences a common cold during winter and 20 percent has a cold during the summer.

curative virtues for vitamins, alkalizers, lemon drinks, antihistamines, decongestants, timed-release capsules, antibiotics, antiseptic gargles, bioflavonoids, nose drops and sprays, and a variety of other products. There are at least three hundred over-the-counter products, most of which are a combination of ingredients sold for the treatment of symptoms of the common cold. Many of these drugs neither benefit nor harm the cold victim, but there is no doubt that they benefit the drug manufacturers! Now—just as fifty years ago—Americans on average will suffer two to three colds a year, with the infectious stages lasting about a week, regardless of any physical measure, diet, or drug used. U.S. Public Health Service studies show that, during the winter quarter of the year, 50 percent of the population experiences a common cold; during the summer quarter, the figure drops to 20 percent. The increased incidence of colds in winter reflects the fact that people spend more time indoors, thereby allowing the viruses to travel from person to person. In fact, one is less likely to catch a cold after exposure to the elements than after mixing with a convivial group of sniffers and sneezers at a fireside gathering.