

## Writing focus: What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of about 6–12 sentences about one **topic**. Every sentence in a strong paragraph is about the same topic. All of the sentences explain the writer's **main idea** (most important idea) about that topic. When the writer wants to write about a new main idea, he / she begins a new paragraph.

A paragraph can give information, tell an opinion, explain something, or even tell a short story. The sentences are arranged logically, so the reader can easily understand what the writer wants to say.

In academic writing, a paragraph has a **topic sentence** that directly tells the reader the main idea. The other sentences in the paragraph, called **supporting sentences**, give more information about the topic. They add specific details and explanations. In academic English, the topic sentence is usually (but not always!) first or last.

**11** Work with a partner. Read the groups of sentences below and on page 10. Circle the letters of the strong paragraphs. If you think the sentences make a weak paragraph, say why. Choose one or more of these reasons:

- The sentences are not all about the same topic.
- There are not enough sentences.
- There is no topic sentence.
- Some sentences say the same thing.

*When I need a good place to study, I go to the library. It's always quiet there, so I can concentrate. It's easy to find the books I need, and I can search for information on the Internet because there are several computers. The other people in the library are also reading or working, so the mood is good for studying. I study better and faster in the library than in any other place.*

a. ....  
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*I need to buy a motorcycle. With a motorcycle, I could get to my job more quickly. It takes two hours to get to work by train. That's very slow. A motorcycle is much faster. If I had a motorcycle, I could save a lot of time. Taking the train is not fast enough for me.*

b. ....  
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