

Detailed Paragraph – Structure and Description (Response to Literature essays)

The difference between a basic paragraph and a “detailed paragraph” is that the latter contains much more detail and support. The outline below shows the different types of sentences to be used and their typical structure:

- **Topic/Reason Sentence** (tied to a major point -- or **reason** given -- in the thesis statement)
 - **Support #1** – broadly explains your first reason and connects to thesis
 - **Detail / Example** – provides evidence from the text to prove your support is true (be sure to introduce the quote!)
 - **Commentary** – comments on and explains importance of the detail (explains why you chose the quote you’re using—why it is important to the essay)
 - **Commentary 2** – optional, additional comments relating back to reason #1
 - **Support #2** – broadly explains your first reason and connects to thesis
 - **Detail / Example** – provides evidence from the text to prove your support is true (be sure to introduce the quote!)
 - **Commentary** – comments on and explains importance of the detail (explains why you chose the quote you’re using—why it is important to the essay)
 - **Commentary 2** – optional comments relating back to reason #1 and transitioning into the next paragraph
 - **Optional Support #3 and related detail/commentary**
- **Conclusion (or clincher) sentence** – only necessary in a stand-alone paragraph

DEFINITIONS:

Topic/Reason sentence – This is the main idea of the paragraph, which the balance of the paragraph will be spent developing. This sentence serves as an umbrella, or boundary, under/in which all other sentences must fall. Phrasing should be clear and straightforward. Avoid using redundant and wordy phrases (“I think that,” “I believe”) and be sure to make a statement that must be proven.

Support sentences – These contain the major ideas or proofs that support the topic sentence. Formal paragraphs will contain at least two of these sentences. If there are many ideas that support a topic sentence, it may be necessary to break the paragraph into two or more paragraphs. There is no pre-set number of how many of these

sentences a paragraph should contain; their number should be based on how much support is necessary to prove the point. One may begin these sentences with transition words such as “First,” and “Second,” but avoid wordy phrases that restate the topic sentence (“The first reason that I think that . . .”).

Detail/Example sentences – These contain actual examples or evidence to demonstrate the point being made in the above support/elaboration. Usually the information in these sentences will be quite specific/factual (i.e. quotes from the text). Always integrate the quote by introducing it or weaving it into the writing (no naked quotes)!

Commentary(or elaboration) sentences – These clarify or expand on the idea just given in the above support sentence. These sentences help to further explain the point that has just been made without giving an actual example or evidence. (They fall into the *interpretation* category because they are not factual examples. Commentary sentences demonstrate the writer’s ability to “read between the lines.”) More than one commentary sentence is sometimes necessary.

Conclusion/Clincher sentence – This is not a restatement of your topic sentence. This sentence should summarize your position by adding a little extra punch. The reader will know how you view a subject by the tone or thought that you leave with the reader. **(Note: In a multi-paragraph essay, body paragraphs do not require concluding sentences.** Instead, the last sentence of the paragraph should provide a smooth transition to the next paragraph.)

DETAILED PARAGRAPH SAMPLE:

(This paragraph is one “chunk” taken from an essay on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Written by P. Wopschall – revised by A. Mattos)

Mr. Van Daan’s pessimistic attitude is one of his most annoying traits. His negativity is apparent in the scene where he asks his wife what is being served for dinner. She answers her husband by saying, “Beans,” and Mr. Van Daan complains, “Not again” (361). Instead of being grateful for the food that Miep and the Frank family work so hard to provide, he shows only disappointment and disgust. People are rationing food during war-time, and Miep risks her life daily trying to buy food on the Black Market, yet Mr. Van Daan thinks of nothing but his own appetite. Another example of Mr. Van Daan’s gloomy outlook is when he speaks to the bewildered Mr. Dussel upon his sudden arrival in the Annex. Mr. Van Daan asks Dussel, “Did Mr. Kraler warn you that you won’t get much to eat here? You can imagine . . . and now you make eight” (369). In this situation, Mr. Van Daan’s reaction is the exact opposite of the warm hospitality that Mr. Frank shows his guest. Instead of thinking of the importance of saving another life, he thinks only of the difficulties created by adding another refugee to the hiding place. It is no wonder that Anne Frank writes such scathing comments in her diary about the ill-mannered Mr. Van Daan.

Sample Paragraph Outline and color scheme:

Topic Sentence: Mr. Van Daan's pessimistic attitude is one of his most annoying traits.

Support #1: His negativity is apparent in the scene where he asks his wife what is being served for dinner.

Detailed example/quote: She answers her husband by saying, "Beans," and Mr. Van Daan complains, "Not again" (361).

Commentary: Instead of being grateful for the food that Miep and the Frank family work so hard to provide, he shows only disappointment and disgust.

Commentary: People are rationing food during war-time, and Miep risks her life daily trying to buy food on the Black Market, yet Mr. Van Daan thinks of nothing but his own appetite.

Support #2: Another example of Mr. Van Daan's gloomy outlook is when he speaks to the bewildered Mr. Dussel upon his sudden arrival in the Annex.

Detailed example/quote: Mr. Van Daan asks Dussel, "Did Mr. Kraler warn you that you won't get much to eat here? You can imagine . . . and now you make eight" (369).

Commentary: In this situation, Mr. Van Daan's reaction is the exact opposite of the warm hospitality that Mr. Frank shows his guest.

Commentary: Instead of thinking of the importance of saving another life, he thinks only of the difficulties created by adding another refugee to the hiding place.

Concluding sentence: It is no wonder that Anne Frank writes such scathing comments in her diary about the ill-mannered Mr. Van Daan.