

## Unit 10 : Introduction to Composition Writing

### Contents:

1. Organization of a composition
2. Outline of a composition
3. Thesis statement
4. Developing support or body paragraphs
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### Objectives:

After studying this Unit, a student

- knows what a composition is, and how a composition is organized.
- can write an outline for a composition.
- knows what a thesis sentence of a composition is, and knows how to write it.
- can write the support paragraphs of a composition.
- can do the exercises effectively.

## 1. Organization of a composition

The emphasis so far has been on writing paragraphs with the use of methods of paragraph development as defined in these materials. In this and the two following Units, the emphasis will be on writing compositions with the same methods as that of paragraphs.

What is a composition? How is it organized? How many paragraphs is it composed of? How does it begin and end? And how long should a composition be? The following example composition on the topic "The Organization of a Composition" can answer these questions.

Topic --->  
sentence

Introductory  
paragraph

Thesis  
sentence  
containing  
main idea

<sup>1</sup> A composition is a piece of short writing formed by a group of not less than three paragraphs that explain or prove one idea called "the main idea" to the reader in various aspects and purposes. <sup>2</sup> The main idea is expressed in a sentence called "the thesis sentence". <sup>3</sup> This thesis sentence gives the plan or direction for the whole composition and the composition must be expanded or developed according to that plan. <sup>4</sup> No matter what the thesis or plan of the particular composition is, all compositions consist of an introductory paragraph, support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph.

Topic --->  
sentence

Support  
paragraph 1

<sup>1</sup> The introductory paragraph is quite brief <sup>2</sup> It may begin with a topic sentence followed by two or more additional sentences. <sup>3</sup> This paragraph should contain the thesis sentence in which the main idea of the whole composition is stated. <sup>4</sup> This sentence serves as the plan of composition <sup>5</sup> The introduction may end with the thesis sentence or additional sentences that clarify the meanings of the terms used in the thesis sentence, or that lead into the support paragraphs of the composition.

Topic --->  
sentence

Support  
paragraph 2

<sup>1</sup> The support paragraphs are paragraphs that explain, discuss or prove the thesis sentence stated in the introductory paragraph. <sup>2</sup> In a short composition, there may be only two or three support paragraphs, depending on the points expressed in the thesis sentence. <sup>3</sup> If there are many points in the thesis sentence to be discussed, the composition may consist of more than three support paragraphs. <sup>4</sup> Each support paragraph has its own topic sentence which clarifies one of the points indicated in the thesis sentence. <sup>5</sup> The topic sentence of a support paragraph of any composition can be de-

veloped by details with the use of the various methods of paragraph development, that is, by comparison and contrast, cause and effect or analysis and so on.

Topic sentence --> <sup>1</sup> Like the introductory paragraph, the conclusion paragraph is also brief. <sup>2</sup> It may be a single sentence or a paragraph of three or four sentences. <sup>3</sup> It summarizes the main points of the composition. <sup>4</sup> It may restate the main idea with a final statement. <sup>5</sup> This paragraph shows that there are no more details about the topic to be discussed.

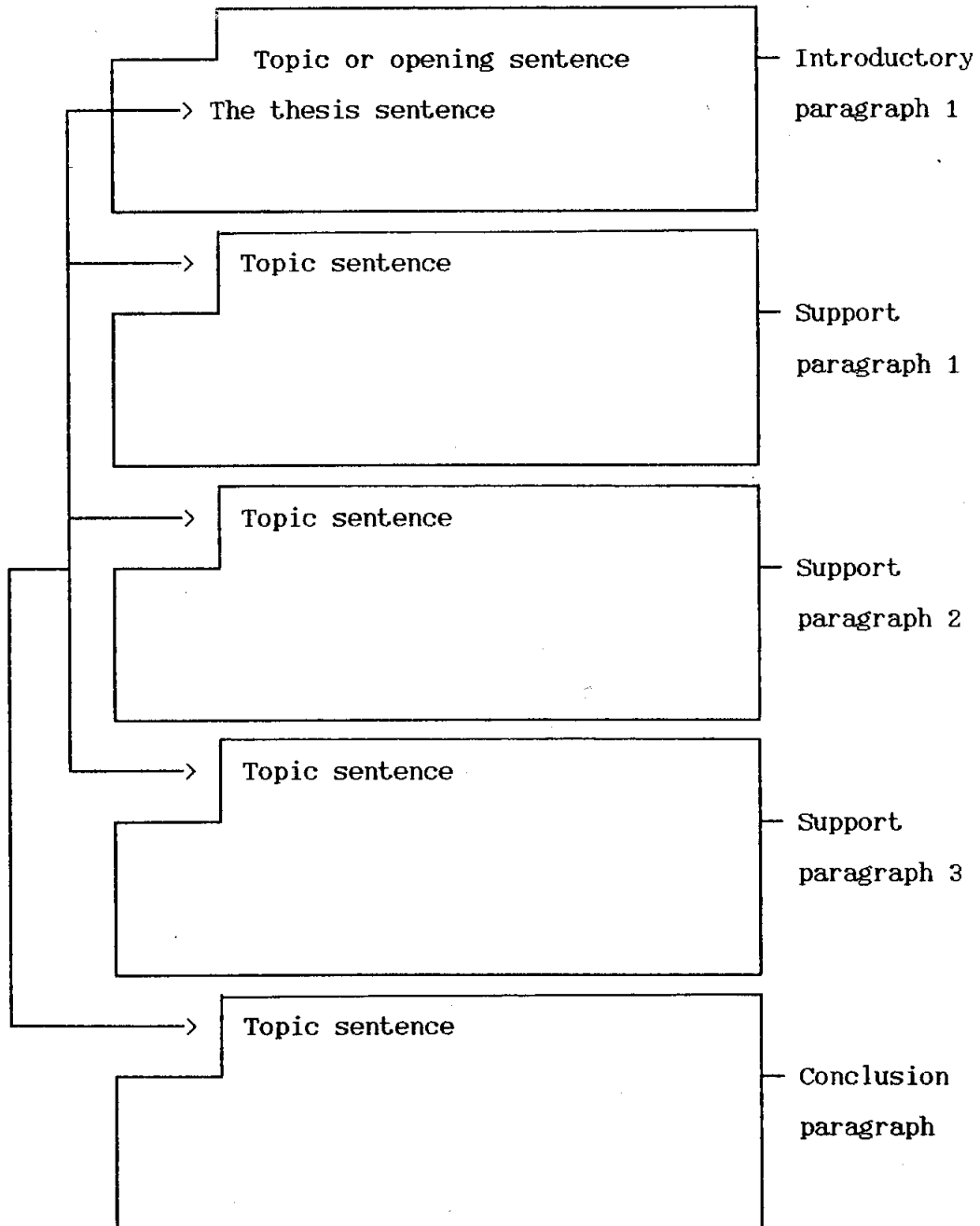
Support paragraph 3

Topic sentence --> <sup>1</sup> These three elements form the complete composition. <sup>2</sup> Without them, the writing is not a composition at all. <sup>3</sup> Rather it is only part of a composition which may not convey the writer's idea to the reader fully and effectively.

Conclusion paragraph

The example composition above is composed of five paragraphs: an introductory paragraph, three support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph. Each paragraph has its own topic sentence which is underlined. In fact, some compositions may have more than three support paragraphs. This depends on the complexity of the topic and the points to be discussed you have defined in the

thesis sentence. This example composition can help you understand best those questions raised above. The pattern of the organization of the above composition can be shown by the diagram below.



## 2. The outline of a composition

Before you start writing a composition, it is helpful for you to make an outline of the composition. In making the outline, the first step for you is to choose the subject or topic you will write about. In choosing the subject, you should choose one in which you are interested, or one about which you know something or one about which you either have or can find enough information. After you have chosen the subject, the next step for you is to decide on major points about the subject to be included in the composition, and then list all the major points to make an outline. The outline will help you write the composition easily because it is a plan along which all details are organized. There are many ways to make an outline of a composition, but it is not necessary to follow any strict outline form. An outline based on the three support paragraphs of the example composition is as follows.

Thesis sentence  
containing three  
aspects to be  
developed in three  
support paragraphs

No matter what the thesis or plan for the particular composition is, all compositions consist of <sup>1</sup> an introductory paragraph. <sup>2</sup> support paragraphs and a <sup>3</sup> conclusion paragraph.

**Topic** -----> I: The introductory paragraph, quite brief sentence

of the first.

**support paragraph**

support --->  
sentences

- A. May begin with a topic sentence
  - 1. followed by two or more sentences
  - 2. contains the thesis sentence
- B. May end with the thesis sentence or additional sentences that
  - 1. clarify the meaning of the terms used in the thesis sentence
  - 2. lead to the support paragraphs to come

Topic sentence ---> II: Support paragraphs, explain, discuss or prove the thesis sentence

**of the second support paragraph**

support--->  
sentences

- A. Each support paragraph has its own topic sentence
- B. Each support paragraph may be developed in one of various ways

Topic sentence -----> III. The conclusion paragraph, brief of the third

**support paragraph**

**support**

sentences

- A. May be a single sentence
- B. Summarizes the main point

### 3. **The thesis sentence of a composition**

A composition, like a paragraph, is controlled by one main or central idea. In a composition, the sentence that contains the main idea is called the "thesis sentence". The thesis sentence of a composition plays an essential role similar to that of the topic sentence of a paragraph. That is, it contains the writer's expression of an attitude, opinion or idea about the subject. Unlike the topic sentence, however, the thesis sentence is broader and expresses the main idea for the entire composition.

The thesis sentence is likely to have characteristics similar to those of a topic sentence. There are a few points to be considered about a thesis sentence.

3.1. The thesis sentence of a composition should be expressed in a complete sentence.

Not a thesis sentence:

The organization of a composition

A thesis sentence:

A composition is composed of an introductory **paragraph**, support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph.

3.2. The thesis sentence should express the writer's opinion, attitude or idea; it should not simply announce the topic being discussed.



Not a thesis sentence:

A composition can be written

A thesis sentence:

A **composition** can be written in the following way.

3.3. The thesis sentence should express an opinion; it should not express a fact. Since the thesis sentence is the sentence that expresses the writer's opinion, attitude or idea, it is really a statement that someone may disagree with. Therefore, it should ~~be~~ a statement that needs to be proved or explained.

Not a thesis sentence:

There is air pollution today.

A thesis sentence:

Air pollution may affect **one's** health.

3.4. The thesis sentence should contain only one idea about one topic. If it contains two or more ideas, the composition will not have unity and coherence due to the fact the function of a composition is to explain or prove only one idea just as the function one paragraph is.

Not a thesis sentence:

Composition writing is based on several steps,  
and the introductory paragraph is the most  
important paragraph of the composition.

idea 1

idea 2

A thesis sentence:

Composition writing is based on four practical steps.

How is a good thesis sentence written? In a paragraph, the topic sentence plays an important role in such a way that it serves as a plan for the whole paragraph and it defines the method of paragraph development. Like the topic sentence, the thesis sentence of a composition plays the same role. In almost all previous Units, you have practiced writing topic sentences for different methods of paragraph development. Writing a good thesis sentence for a composition is the same as writing a good topic sentence for a paragraph. If you can write a topic sentence well, you can also write a thesis sentence well.

The important thing, however, is that both topic and thesis sentences are based on the opinions, attitudes or ideas that you express on the subject (topic). What you think or what you express may be right or wrong; the reader is the person that must decide on the basis of what you have written. If you have no ideas, you cannot write at all.

#### **4. Developing support or body paragraphs**

After you have completed an outline and an effective thesis sentence, the next step is for you to develop support paragraphs. It is true that support paragraphs are the heart of a composition because their function is to explain, discuss or

prove the main idea indicated in the thesis sentence. Keep in mind the following points about the support paragraphs

4.1. Each support paragraph is related to the thesis sentence and discusses or explains only one point or aspect of the thesis sentence. Therefore, there must be only one main idea in one support paragraph.

4.2. Each support paragraph has its own topic sentence. The topic sentence of each support paragraph is based on some aspect of the main idea stated in the thesis sentence.

4.3. The support paragraphs of a composition may be developed with the use of only one method or may be developed by different methods of paragraph development. That is, a composition whose plan, defined in the thesis sentence, is to discuss cause and effect does not necessarily require that it be supported by only cause and effect paragraphs. It can also be supported by other kinds of paragraph. This depends on the plan you define in the topic sentence and the details you include in each support paragraph.

To develop support paragraphs, the first task for you is to write a topic sentence. The topic sentence of each paragraph of a composition must be based on some aspect of the main idea expressed in the thesis sentence. Therefore, before writing a topic sentence, you should consider the meaning of the thesis sentence carefully, and then break it down logically into sub-

ideas. These sub-ideas will be developed into the topic sentences, according to different methods of paragraph development: cause and effect, comparison and contrast, division, classification or process analysis as discussed previously in Units 5-9.

There are no specific principles for breaking down the main idea of the thesis sentence. One easy way, however, is to turn it into a question. The answers to this question may help you to come up with possible sub-ideas for support paragraphs; they can also help you determine or pave a way for the organization of your composition. Study the following examples that show the meaning of the thesis sentence broken down into sub-ideas for support paragraphs.

1. Thesis sentence: To be a good listener, one should follow--though in fact, there may be more--the following three practical steps

Question: What are the three steps?

Answer: - Listening to others with a democratic spirit  
- Analyzing others', views and opinions  
- Raising questions with good intentions and polite manners

The main idea in the thesis sentence is "should follow three practical steps." The topic sentences of each support paragraph will be based on these sub-ideas and developed into three complete paragraphs. Here the writer is likely to break down the

main idea into the steps of the process of "how to be a good listener"

2. Thesis sentence: Watching television is not a waste of time.

Question: Why is it not a waste of time?

- Answers: - Be abreast of current situations  
- Acquire new knowledge  
- Relax after work

The main idea in the thesis sentence is "not a waste of time". The writer breaks down the main idea into three aspects. The topic sentences will be written based on these aspects. The paragraphs will be developed in such a way that they provide the reasons to prove that main idea "not a waste of time".

To show how the support paragraphs are developed, the body of the composition to develop the thesis sentence in the first example given above could be as follows:

Thesis sentence: To be a good listener, one should follow--though there may be more--the following three practical steps.

Sub-ideas about  
main idea in the  
thesis sentence

- [ Listening to others with a democratic spirit  
Analyzing others' views and opinions  
Raising questions with good intentions

<sup>1</sup> The most important aspect of being a good listener is to listen to others with a democratic spirit. <sup>2</sup> A democratic spirit here means, first, that everyone has the right to an opinion. <sup>3</sup> A person's social level, profession or whatever has nothing to do with his right to have an opinion. <sup>4</sup> Second, every individual has the right to express his opinion. <sup>5</sup> A person's right to express his opinion, however, does not include making empty accusations. <sup>6</sup> Different individuals have different ideas or opinions about a subject. <sup>7</sup> The democratic listener must not prejudge what he hears. <sup>8</sup> He should listen to others' ideas with respect.

<sup>1</sup> Second, having listened to others with a democratic spirit, he should logically analyze their views and opinions because they may not be either totally right or totally wrong. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, he should consider whether whatever the other says is rational or irrational. <sup>3</sup> Then he should accept the rational expressions and discard the others. <sup>4</sup> This would help him acquire accurate knowledge and lead to appropriate practice.

<sup>1</sup> Last, when raising questions or expressing ideas contrary to the others, he should do it with good intentions and good manners. <sup>2</sup> That is, he should ask questions respectfully, politely and sincerely.

<sup>3</sup> He should not do it with the intention of showing off his superiority in knowledge or self - centered views and opinions. <sup>4</sup> If he does so, it is not

exchanging ideas leading to proper conclusions.

<sup>5</sup> Rather, it may bring about serious controversies and quarrels at the end.

With this demonstration, it is adequate for you to understand how to write a topic sentence for support paragraphs and how to develop it into complete support paragraphs because you have been well trained to write a topic sentence and a paragraph using different methods throughout these materials.

To sum up

1. A composition with any kind of writing method is composed of an introductory paragraph, two or more support or body paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph.

2. An introductory paragraph contains one main idea expressed in a sentence called the thesis sentence. This sentence serves as a plan of a whole composition and prepares the reader for what is to come in the next paragraphs.

3. Each support or body paragraph is directly related to the thesis sentence and discusses only one point or aspect of the main idea in the thesis sentence.

4. Each support paragraph has its own topic sentence based on some aspect of the main idea expressed in the thesis sentence.

## 5. Exercises about the organization of a composition

### Exercise 1.

Directions: The following are thesis sentences. Study their meanings carefully to determine what sub-ideas should follow. Then break down the thesis sentences into sub-ideas suitable for being the topics of support paragraphs. Write your sub-ideas in the spaces provided. The first one is done as an example.

1. Thesis sentence: In order to make a good impression at a job interview, you should prepare yourself well for the interview.

sub-ideas: [ 1. prepare answers to the possible questions  
2. prepare what you are going to wear  
3. make sure you arrive on time

2. Thesis sentence: People go to department stores for many different reasons.

sub-ideas: [ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_



3. Thesis sentence: The rate of crime which threatens our society is seemingly increasing because of two main factors.

sub-ideas: [ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Thesis sentence: Traffic congestion in Bangkok can be solved in three ways.

sub-ideas: [ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Thesis sentence: The human body consists of four important functional organs to maintain life.

sub-ideas: [ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Thesis sentence: Chiangmai today is similar to Bangkok in the following aspects.

sub-ideas: [ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Exercise 2.

Directions: The following sentences are thesis sentences with two or more sub-ideas for support paragraphs. Use these subideas to write topic sentences for support paragraphs in the spaces provided. The first one is done as an example.

1. Thesis sentence: Smoking cigarettes can bring about many bad effects.

sub-ideas: [ 1. disgusting  
2. waste of money  
3. harmful to health

Topic sentences for support paragraphs: [ 1. smoking is a disgusting habit for those who do not smoke.  
2. It is a waste of money with no advantages.  
3. It is very harmful to the smoker's health.

2. Thesis sentence: An RU student can be classified into one of two main groups, according to the way he studies.

sub-ideas: [ 1. study at home  
2. attend class regularly

Topic sentences  
for support  
paragraphs:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Thesis sentence: There are three aspects that make learning English difficult for Thai students.

sub-ideas:

- 1. pronunciation
- 2. grammatical rules
- 3. vocabulary

Topic sentences:  
for support  
paragraphs:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Thesis sentence: Exercising is good for one's health for two reasons.

sub-ideas:

- 1. for physical health
- 2. for mental health

Topic sentences  
for support  
paragraphs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Thesis sentence: Without regarding the opportunities for good education, jobs and medical care, Bangkok is a bad place to live in for three reasons.

sub-ideas:

1. traffic
2. pollution
3. crime

Topic sentences  
for support  
paragraphs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Exercise 3. The following two thesis sentences are accompanied by two topic sentences to be developed into support paragraphs. Find support details for each topic sentence, and then write support paragraphs based on the thesis sentences given in the spaces provided.

Thesis sentence 1: Although there are many ways in which the watchers benefit from TV, they are also detrimentally affected by the TV set itself and the programs it broadcasts.

Topic sentence 1: While turned on, the TV set produces harmful radioactivity rays called ultraviolet rays. (Write support sentences to prove this topic sentence here.) \_\_\_\_\_

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Topic sentence 2: Some programs shown on TV also affect the watcher's behavior, especially teenagers and children. (Write support sentences to prove this topic sentence here.) \_\_\_\_\_

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Thesis sentence 2: Democratic and communist governments are different in their political philosophy.

Topic sentence 1: The philosophy of a democratic government is that people are supreme and the government is their servant. (Write support sentences to prove

this topic sentence here.)

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Topic sentence 2: On the contrary, the philosophy of a communist government is that the government is supreme and the people are its servants. (Write support sentences to prove this topic sentence here) \_\_\_\_\_

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