A common complaint many instructors have with student papers is the lack of well developed paragraphs, which are essential to strong papers. A well developed paragraph articulates a main point, gives examples that demonstrate that main point, and explains the significance of those examples. A well developed paragraph leaves the reader feeling that the information given is thorough and complete.

A paragraph is a series of sentences organized into a unit of meaning. Each paragraph should be designed around a central controlling idea that dictates what information will be found in the paragraph. An essay about a country’s cuisine, for example, might contain paragraphs with controlling ideas such as common ingredients, traditional foods, and foreign influences.

Typically, paragraphs in academic essays consist of the following elements:

- A controlling idea, which is the main point of the paragraph. The controlling idea often appears in a topic sentence.
  - Example topic sentence: *Taiwan’s coastal geography greatly influences Taiwanese cuisine.*

- Explanation of the controlling idea. Give more information your reader needs to understand your controlling idea.
  - Example explanation: *Taiwan is an island, and fishing has traditionally supplied an abundance of fresh fish and seafood.*

- A supporting detail, quote, or example to illustrate your controlling idea.
  - Example: *Oysters are an especially common ingredient in Taiwanese food. They appear in dishes such as oyster omelet and oyster vermicelli, both of which are popular street foods.*

- Explanation or analysis of how the supporting detail, quote, or example relates to your controlling idea.
  - Example: *The ready availability of such shellfish makes them a staple in Taiwanese cuisine.*

A paragraph may contain more than one supporting detail, quote, or example, but each one must be followed by explanation or analysis in order to ensure that the paragraph is well developed. Here is our finished example paragraph:

*Taiwan’s coastal geography greatly influences Taiwanese cuisine. Taiwan is an island, and fishing has traditionally supplied an abundance of fresh fish and seafood. Oysters are an especially common ingredient in Taiwanese food. They appear in dishes such as oyster omelet and oyster vermicelli, both of which are popular street foods. The ready availability of such shellfish makes them a staple in Taiwanese cuisine. Also popular are skewers of marinated, grilled squid, often sold by street vendors. As an island nation, Taiwan treats seafood not as an occasional delicacy but as an everyday snack.*
Practice writing well developed paragraphs using the template below.

1. What is the controlling idea of this paragraph?

2. Write a topic sentence that contains the controlling idea.

3. Write a sentence further explaining what the reader needs to understand about the controlling idea.

4. Give a supporting detail, quote, or example.

5. Explain how your supporting detail, quote, or example relates to your controlling idea.

6. Give another supporting detail, quote, or example.

7. Explain how the second supporting detail, quote, or example relates to your controlling idea.

8. Give a third supporting detail, quote, or example.

9. Explain how the third supporting detail, quote, or example relates to your controlling idea.

If you want additional help with your paragraphs, bring your finished work to the English Center for review with a tutor.