

EXPRESSING YOUR OPINION

Preview

In this lecture, we are going to discuss how to write a paragraph in which you express an **opinion** and support it. We will also study

- distinguishing between opinions and facts
- adjective clauses with **who**, **which**, and **that**
- a different kind of fragment
- quotation marks

TEXT ORGANIZATION. OPINION PARAGRAPHS

In everyday life, people have opinions about issues and talk about them. Should smoking be allowed everywhere? Should the government ban lotteries?

People also write their opinions. If you look at the mass media resources, you will find letters or posts from people discussing their points of view. In college classes, you often have to express and support your opinions.

There are **four keys** to writing a successful opinion paragraph.

1. State your opinion clearly in the topic sentence.
2. Explain each reason in logical order.
3. Use facts to support each reason.
4. End with a powerful concluding sentence that your reader will remember.

FACTS AND OPINIONS

Opinions are statements of someone's belief. When you say, "I believe..." or "I think that ..." you are expressing your opinion. Opinions are different from facts. People can disagree with opinions. **Facts** are true statements that no one can disagree with.

Which ones are facts, and which ones are opinions?

The sun rises in the east.	The sunrise was beautiful this morning.
The temperature of the lake is 10°C.	The lake is too cold for swimming.

According to highway accident reports, using a cell phone while driving is dangerous.	Using a cell phone while driving is dangerous.
Women could not vote in the United States until 1920.	Everyone should vote.
Mrs. Kingsley said, “I am a good mother.”	Mrs. Kingsley is a good mother.

The sentences on the left side are facts. They are true. Even the last sentence, “Mrs. Kingsley said, ‘I am a good mother,’ ” is a fact. It is a fact that she said this. What she said—“I am a good mother”—is an opinion, but the fact is that Mrs. Kingsley said something. No one can disagree with the fact that she said something.

The sentences in the right column are opinions. People can disagree with them. They may or may not be true.

Of course, you can use opinions as reasons, but your paragraph will be stronger if you support your opinion with facts.

OPINION PARAGRAPH

Model 1 **Video Games and Violence**

¹In my opinion, violent video games are harmful to young people. ²First of all, playing these games can cause changes in the behavior of young people. ³According to studies by psychologists, frequent players have poorer grades in school. ⁴They are also more hostile and act more aggressively toward their teachers and classmates. ⁵A second reason that violent video games are harmful to young people is that they make young people less sensitive to violence in the real world. ⁶The games make it fun to shoot and kill, and the line between play violence and real violence becomes very thin or disappears entirely. ⁷Thirteen-year-old Noah Wilson was stabbed to death by a friend who often played the violent game “Mortal Kombat™” ⁸Noah’s mother said, “The boy who stabbed him was acting out the part of Cyrex,” who is a character in the game. ⁹A third reason that violent video games are harmful to young people is that they teach players to use violence to solve problems. ¹⁰If classmates tease you, don’t try to work it out—bring a gun to school and shoot them. ¹¹An extreme example of this kind of thinking resulted in the Columbine High School massacre. ¹²Two students shot and killed twelve classmates, a teacher, and themselves at Columbine High School in Colorado. ¹³The two young killers were fans of the games “Doom™” and “Wolfenstein 3D™.” ¹⁴For these three reasons, I feel that violent video games are harmful to young people and should be controlled—or, even better, banned.

Questions on the Model

1. What is the writer's opinion about violent video games? What phrase does she use to introduce her opinion?
2. How many reasons does she give for her opinion?
3. What order does she use to discuss her reasons?
4. In your opinion, which reason is stronger—the first one or the last one? Why?

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An Example of an Outline

Topic sentence	<i>In my opinion, violent video games are harmful to young people</i>
First reason	<i>A. Playing these games can cause changes in the behavior of young people</i>
Detail	<i>1. According to psychologists, frequent players have poorer grades in school.</i>
Detail	<i>2. They are also more hostile and act more aggressively toward their teachers and classmates.</i>
Second reason	<i>B.</i>
Detail	<i>1.</i>
Detail	<i>2.</i>
Detail	<i>3.</i>
Third reason	<i>C.</i>
Detail	<i>1.</i>
Detail	<i>2.</i>
Detail	<i>3.</i>
Concluding sentence	

TRANSITION SIGNALS FOR OPINION PARAGRAPHS

1. When you state an opinion, you should indicate that it is an opinion by using an opinion signal, such as one of these.

In my opinion, . . . (with a comma)	In my opinion, everyone should be allowed to own a gun.
In my view, . . . (with a comma)	In my view, no one should be allowed to own a gun.
I believe (that) . . . (without a comma)	I believe that smoking should not be allowed in public places.
I think (that) . . . (without a comma)	I think smokers have rights too.

NB!

Notice that the first two opinion signals are followed by commas. The second two do not have commas, and you may omit the connecting word ***that***.

2.To give information from an outside source (a book, a newspaper, another person), use ***according to*** with a comma.

<p>According to X,(with a comma)</p>	<p>According to Gregory, his mother never wrote to him or sent him birthday cards. According to a story in <i>Science Today</i> magazine, the Earth is becoming warmer.</p>
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3.In your concluding sentence, you can remind your reader of the number of reasons

<p>For these (two, three, four, and so on) reasons, ... (with a comma)</p>	<p>For these two reasons, I believe that pesticides are harmful.</p>
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If you wish, make a recommendation for action.

For these three reasons, the government should ban the use of all pesticides.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

In this lecture, you will learn about another kind of dependent clause called an **adjective clause (a relative clause, an attributive clause)**. Reading the model text we can see three sentences containing the word ***who*** and one sentence containing the word ***which***.

Model 2 **School Uniforms**

In my opinion, public school students should wear uniforms. ²First of all, students who wear uniforms behave better. ³Long Beach, California, which was one of the first cities in the United States to require uniforms in elementary and middle school, reported increased attendance and decreased bad behavior. ⁴In the first year, school crime decreased by 36 percent, fighting by 51 percent, and vandalism by 18 percent. ⁵A second reason for requiring school uniforms is that uniforms increase school spirit. ⁶According to a survey taken in South Carolina, middle school students who wear school uniforms have more positive feelings about their schools than students in schools with no uniforms. ⁷Third, schools that require uniforms erase economic and social differences. ⁸Students from wealthy, middle class, and poor families all wear the same clothes to school, so parents don't feel pressure to spend a lot of money for the latest fashions. ⁹Also, students who cannot afford the latest fashions do not feel self-conscious. ¹⁰For these three reasons, I feel that public schools in the United States should require students to wear uniforms, at least in grades K-8.

Questions on the Model

1. How many reasons does the writer give for requiring school uniforms in elementary and middle school?
2. Are all of the reasons supported with facts?

ADJECTIVE CLAUSES WITH *WHO*, *WHICH*, AND *THAT*

In earlier lectures, you studied dependent clauses beginning with words such as *because*, *since*, *when*, *after*, *before*, and *if*. These clauses are called adverb clauses because they act like adverbs. That is they give more information about a verb.

There is another kind of dependent clause that begins with words such as ***who***, ***which***, and ***that***. These clauses are called **adjective clauses** because they act like adjectives. That is, they **give more information about nouns**.

Students **who** wear uniforms behave better.

Long Beach, California, **which** was one of the first cities in the United States to require uniforms in elementary and middle school, reported increased attendance and decreased bad behavior.

Schools **that** require uniforms erase economic and social differences.

In the following sentences:

- the adjective clause is underlined
- **who, which, or that**
- the noun that the adjective clause gives more information about. Notice that the adjective clause comes directly after that noun.

Here are some things to know about adjective clauses:

1. Adjective clauses begin with the words **who**, **which**, and **that** (and others).
 - who** is used for people
 - which** is used for things (and animals)
 - that** is used for things (and for people in informal English)
2. An adjective clause always follows the noun it gives more information about.
3. Commas are sometimes used with adjective clauses, and sometimes not. (We will learn about this rule later.)

PUNCTUATING ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

In some situations, you use commas with adjective clauses and in some situations, you don't. Using commas depends on whether the information in an adjective clause is necessary to identify the noun or just gives extra information about it.

Compare the sentences in the following chart:

Extra information	Necessary information
(Use commas)	(Don't use commas)
Rachel Kingsley, who uses drugs, is not a good parent.	A person who uses drugs is not a good parent.

- In the sentence on the left, the adjective clause ***who uses drugs*** is extra information about Rachel Kingsley. We don't need this information to identify her because her name tells us who she is. If an adjective clause gives extra information, separate it from the rest of the sentence with commas.

- In the sentence on the right, the adjective clause ***who uses drugs*** is necessary information to identify ***person***. Which person is not a good parent?—a person who uses drugs. If the information in an adjective clause is necessary, do not use commas.

Extra information	Necessary information
(Use commas)	(Don't use commas)
Children shouldn't play the video game <i>Grand Theft Auto</i> , which teaches criminal behavior.	Children shouldn't play video games which/that teach criminal behavior.
Sergio, who is sitting next to the window, isn't paying attention.	The student who is sitting next to the window isn't paying attention.
Let's study at my apartment, which is just a few minutes from campus.	They rented an apartment that/which was close to their child's school.

NB!

1. Use ***that*** with necessary clauses only.
Never use commas when a clause begins with ***that***.

*A college major that is very popular these days is psychology.
A book that gives synonyms for words is a thesaurus.*

MORE on PUNCTUATION

These are the rules for punctuating quotations correctly.

Rules	Examples
1. Put quotation marks before and after another person's exact words.	Classmate Sabrina Reyes says, "Mothers of young children should not work because young children need their mothers at home."

<p>2. Use a “reporting phrase,” such as <i>he says</i> or <i>she stated</i>. The reporting phrase can come before, after, or in the middle of the quotation. Separate it with a comma (or two commas).</p>	<p>She stated, “It’s not easy to be a single mother.” “It’s not easy,” she stated, “to be a single mother.” “It’s not easy to be a single mother,” she stated.</p>
<p>3. Another useful reporting phrase is <i>according to</i>. If you use someone’s exact words after <i>according to</i>, use quotation marks.</p>	<p>According to classmate Sabrina Reyes, “Mothers of young children should not work because young children need their mothers at home.”</p>
<p>4. Begin each quotation with a capital letter. When a quoted sentence is separated into two parts, begin the second part with a small letter.</p>	<p>“It’s not easy,” she stated, “to be a single mother.”</p>

5. Commas, periods, and question marks go inside the second quotation mark of a pair.

She said, “Goodbye.”
“Don’t leave so soon,” he replied. “Why not?” she asked.

MORE ABOUT FRAGMENTS

We already know about the sentence error called a fragment. Sometimes this error happens when you write a dependent clause and forget to add an independent clause.

FRAGMENT: If you want to transfer to a four-year college.

FRAGMENT: Because it was raining when we left.

Here is another kind of sentence fragment.

FRAGMENT: Ron, who also takes night classes.

FRAGMENT: The book that was on the table.

In these fragments also, there is **no independent clause**. There is only a noun and an adjective clause. There are two ways to correct this kind of fragment.

1. Finish the independent clause.

CORRECTED: Ron, who also takes night classes, is very busy.

CORRECTED: The book that was on the table belongs to the teacher.

2. Delete *who*, *which*, or *that* to make a simple sentence.

CORRECTED: Ron takes night classes.

CORRECTED: The book was on the table.

NB!

When you fix this kind of fragment by deleting *who*, *which*, or *that*, be sure the remaining words make a meaningful sentence. For example, this is a fragment:

People who cross the street.

If you delete *who*, you get “People cross the street.” This is not a very interesting or meaningful sentence. It is better to correct this fragment by finishing the independent clause:

People who cross the street should look in both directions before stepping off the curb.