

## Paragraph Types: Definition

The starting point for a definition paragraph is a **simple definition\***, which becomes the topic sentence of the paragraph.

**Topic Sentence** gives a simple definition

**Support Sentences** give more information through the use of examples, description, or explanation

**Concluding Sentence** is usually unnecessary unless the definition is embedded in a longer text. If this is the case, the conclusion sentence may link to the next paragraph or series of paragraphs.

\* A simple definition has three parts: **item**, **category**, and **features**.

1. ITEM	2. CATEGORY	3. FEATURES
A forsythia	is a flowering shrub	with yellow, bell-shaped blossoms.
Herbivores	are animals	that feed on plants.
Change	is a process	that involves passing from one state or phase to another.

## Useful transitional words and phrases

### For describing location

in the foreground, in the middle distance, in the background, in the far distance, next to, near, up, down, between, above, below, on top of, beneath, left, right, centre, front, back, middle, in the interior, on the exterior, on the inside, on the outside, surrounding

### For providing an example

for example, for instance, an illustration of this, another example

### For explaining a process

at first, initially, to begin with, in the beginning, first of all, while, as, at the same time, after, next, then, finally, eventually, at last, the first step, the next step, the final /last step

### For explaining cause and effect

when X occurs..., then, because, because of, as a result of, in this way, for this reason, consequently, thus

## Examples of questions requiring a *definition* paragraph

1. What is venture capital?
2. Define 'over-fishing'.
3. What are longitudinal dunes?
4. What is meant by protein quality?
5. What is cholera?

## Sample paragraph 1

### What are longitudinal dunes?

Longitudinal dunes are long, low ridges of sand that lie approximately at right angles to the trend of the sand waves, or parallel to the direction of the wind (Douglas, 2006). Some of the ridges are almost straight, and others are slightly wavy. They range up to about 10 metres in height and 30 metres in width (Douglas, 2006). Many are more than one and one-half kilometres long. Both sides of these dunes have practically the same slope and are usually covered with grass and shrubs (Walmsley, 2008). While the crest is usually bare of vegetation, on some dunes, even the crest is covered. Where this occurs, it means that wind action has stopped on this particular dune (Walmsley, 2008).

## Sample paragraph 2

### What is meant by protein quality?

The term protein quality refers to the ratio of essential amino acids (eaa) in a protein in comparison with the ratio required by the body (Farmer, 2001). A high-quality protein contains eaa in a ratio that matches human requirements, and a low-quality protein is lacking or low in one or more eaa, with the eaa that is in the shortest supply being called the 'limiting' amino acid (Farmer, 2001). In general, animal proteins tend to be high quality while vegetable proteins tend to be low quality, the exception being soy protein, which is quite a high-quality vegetable protein (Smith, 2005).

## Sample paragraph 3

### What is Cholera?

Cholera is an intestinal infection that can be described according to its cause, symptoms, and treatment (Davis, 2006). It is caused by a bacterium, called *Vibrio cholera*, which occurs in contaminated food, water, or faeces, and can result in the rapid spread of this disease (Davis, 2006). According to Simpson (2008), patients who have been exposed to the disease may exhibit mild to extreme symptoms. The primary signs are watery diarrhoea and loss of water and salts. Other symptoms include clammy skin, wrinkled hands and feet, sunken eyes and a dry mouth. If the severe diarrhoea is not treated, it can be life-threatening because of dehydration and electrolyte imbalances (Simpson, 2008). Possible treatments for cholera can include oral or intravenous replacement of fluids and salts as well as certain antibiotics (Davis, 2006). Prompt and appropriate treatment appears to significantly reduce the mortality rate and suffering (Davis, 2006).