

Paragraph structure in IELTS and English for Academic Purposes

A structure of writing that can be seen in many well-written paragraphs is one that has a **controlling idea** which is followed by **supporting information**.

The **controlling idea** is commonly known as the '**topic sentence**' and it introduces an idea, topic, or argument into the main text.

This is then explained further and/or supported by further sentences as illustrated in the examples below.

IELTS Topic Sentence - New point, made in a general way

(The effects of a public smoking ban can have a number of serious **implications** to both smokers and the economy.)

Examples of supporting the topic sentence

- Explanation
- Reason
- Example
- Effect
- Consequence
- Concluding point

EAP Topic Sentence - New point, made in a general way

(The adverse effects of a public smoking ban can have a number of serious **implications** to smokers and the economy.)

Examples of supporting the topic sentence

- Explanation
- Reason
- Example
- Quotation
- Statistics
- Particular aspect or detail;
- Effect or consequence

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For the paragraph to be effective, it is important that explanations and support text relate directly to the topic sentence.

If new points or ideas are introduced, then these should be written in new paragraphs.

It is also important that explanations and support should **not repeat** the general idea of the topic sentence but should **explain** and **support**.

In the examples below, you can see the development of a general idea that moves to more detailed information.

You can also see how certain words link back to the main ideas.

This helps create cohesion within the paragraph and makes the paragraph easy to read and ideas more effective.

IELTS Example

The effects of a public smoking ban can have a number of serious implications to both **smokers** and the **economy**.

One of the most important of these is that might be **discriminatory to smokers** themselves.

Many people argue **that people** have rights to 'freedom of choice' or freedom to choose, and therefore such a ban would be unacceptable in the context of the 'European Convention on Human Rights'.

In addition to this, there are economic implications that a ban on smoking in public places would have disastrous consequences for both **business** and on **government** tax revenue.

Restaurants, bars and pubs would see a decrease in footfall if a larger number of their customers were deterred from visiting because they could not smoke and **governments** would immediately lose a high proportion of revenue from tobacco sales tax.

Overall, it would seem that a ban would be economically and socially distablisling for a country.

EAP Example

The adverse effects of a **public smoking ban** can have a number of serious **implications** to smokers and the economy.

The most important is the fact that it is discriminatory to smokers.

Smith (2015) argues that people have rights to 'freedom of choice' and **such a ban** would be unacceptable in the 'European Convention on Human Rights'.

In addition, the **economic implications** would have disastrous consequences **for business** and **governments**.

Wilson (2015) stresses that **a ban** would place many of those **associated in the tobacco industry** into bankruptcy.

Finally, the cost in lost revenue for the **government** could be approximately £4 Bn a year. (The Economist, 2015).

Overall, it seems that **a ban** could be economically and socially destabilising for a country.

Adapted from (Oxford EAP, 2013)