

DEVELOPMENT BY STATISTICS

To develop a paragraph by statistics, think of the topic sentence as a general statement that needs support. Use numerical data to support the controlling idea of the topic sentence. The amount of statistical data used and the length of the paragraph depend on the complexity of the topic.

The effective use of statistics in a well-developed paragraph requires that you as a writer be especially aware of two things. First, the numerical data should be complete and precise. For example, do not say, "About half of the population of X City drinks polluted water." You must be precise by what is meant by "about." Is it 44.9% or 53.1% or 49% or what? Second, give the source of information. If the writer's data comes from a published source, then that source should be cited. For example, "The Harris Poll reports that 32% of the registered Republicans feel that former President Nixon should have stayed in China," or "U.S. News and World Report states that 16.7% of the American public is oversexed," or "According to the University of New Mexico's Animal Husbandry Department, 38.2% of the white-faced cattle in Cochise County, Arizona, have the pinkeye." Thus, the writer using statistics should be precise with figures and give the source of the data.

Although the specific use of numbers will vary with individual, specific situations, below are some general conventions to keep in mind:

1. Any number that can be written in two words or less should be spelled out.
2. Conversely, use Arabic figures for any number that requires more than two words.
3. In using numbers with percentage, dollars, degrees, and so forth, one can use either figures or write the number if it is two words or less; however, be consistent (that is, 5% or five percent).

The following paragraphs are examples of development by statistics.

Termite Damage

Subterranean termites are a greater threat to property than tornadoes, hurricanes, and fires combined. According to Terminix International's booklet, Subterranean Termite Control (1977), each year termites strike more American homes and businesses than the combination of tornadoes, hurricanes, and fires. The damage to properties from storms in 1976 was \$200,000,000 (30.8%). In contrast, the damage by fires in 1976 was 400,000 (18.2%). On the other hand, the number of properties damaged by termites was 1,800,000 (81.8%).

Jeri Harris

Soft Drinks, Beer, and Litter

In the last fifteen years, United States citizens who are concerned with litter have been losing a battle against the beer and beverage industry. According to Time, back in 1960 Americans drank 95% of the soft drinks and 50% of the beer from refillable bottles. These bottles could be brought back for the deposit money, and they could then be used over and over again. Today, according to the United States Bottlers Association, 79% of packaged beer and two out of three soft drinks are sold in cans and “no deposit, no return” bottles, which are used once and then thrown away. The United States is now using about sixty billion beverage throw-aways per year. These cans and bottles add some nine million tons of trash to the national garbage, in this case located mostly on highways, streets, public parks and beaches. The Research Triangle Institute of North Carolina reported that in 1969 more than two billion beverage containers found their way to the nation’s roadsides. Since then, the yearly totals have reached nearly three billion. Such throwaways account for 20% to 40% of the litter. A 1965 California State Health Board’s study states that more than 300,000 injuries a year are caused by litter. The injuries come mainly from broken beer and soda bottles and pull-tab openers from cans. These figures seem high, but many city and state governments are fighting back to clean up this problem.

Raymond Haydel

The Price of Gold

When the price of gold reached the somewhat mystical psychological barrier of over \$200 per ounce, it caused many people to examine the history of this remarkable yellow element. According to figures published in World Coin News (August 15, 1978), the Forty-Niners panned gold for \$16 an ounce. By 1933, the price of gold was fixed by law at \$20.67 per ounce, and in 1934, the Gold Reserve Act set the price at \$35 per ounce. This increase represents 118.7% in about eighty-five years. The \$35 price remained static until April, 1968, when gold backing for the United States dollar was removed and the price went to \$38 per ounce. Since then, the prices have climbed meteorically. On May 14, 1973, gold rose to \$100 per ounce for a 163% increase in five years. By April, 1974, gold had reached \$179.50 per ounce, but it slumped to \$129 by July 4 of that year. After rather erratic highs and lows for the next two years, gold plunged to \$107.75 an ounce on July 20, 1972. However, the market has steadily increased until the magical \$200 per ounce was reached when the London price was fixed at \$201.30 per ounce on July 28, 1978. Thus, since the Forty-Niners sold their gold for \$16 an ounce, the price has increased 1158% in about 130 years.

Beth Aarons

MIDLEADING STATISTICS

Statistics can be misleading as well as informative. The following paragraph is an example.

Who Lives in San Antonio?

There are no Americans living in San Antonio, Texas. A 1971 survey by the Federal Bureau of Labor and Statistics revealed that 56.5% of San Antonio's population was Mexican-Americans. Another 10.3% were Afro-Americans, and 8.6% were Polish-Americans. German-Americans accounted for 7.9% of the population, while 4.2% were Chinese-Americans and 2.3% were Japanese-Americans. Various Scandinavian-Americans (Danes, Swedes) amounted to 4.1% of the people, and Slavic-Americans (Russians, Czechs, Bulgarians) made up the remaining 6.1% of the city's population. From these statistics, one may conclude that there are no Americans living in San Antonio.

Austin Bonner

PRACTICE EXERCISES

- A. Write three topic sentences which indicate that the paragraph will be developed, at least in part, by the use of statistics.
- B. Choose one of the sentences and support the controlling idea by using numerical data. Answer these questions for yourself: What main fact will the statistics prove (illustrate, support)? To what sources are these statistics attributable?