

# PARAGRAPHS

## WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following: Unity, Coherence, A Topic Sentence, and Adequate Development. As you will see, all of these traits overlap. Using and adapting them to your individual purposes will help you construct effective paragraphs.

### 1.

#### INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS

The most important paragraphs in an essay introduce your topic to your reader. Your introduction may be one paragraph in a fairly short essay or several paragraphs in a longer essay. Just as there is no requirement for the number of paragraphs in an introduction, there is no requirement for the content. Sometimes, students create for themselves a formula for introductions: always begin with a catchy quotation; always begin with a question; always begin by rewording the assignment. Each of these approaches may be appropriate for some essays. None is appropriate for every essay.

A proper introduction should

- \*invite the reader to join you in considering your topic
- \*give the reader a clear idea of what the essay is about
- \*give the reader an idea of the kinds of sources you are considering
- \*give a reader a sense of the context for your topic

#### Some Approaches To Writing An Introduction

##### Beginning with a question

When you begin your essay with a question, you ask your reader to consider with you the problem that inspired you to write. What question are you trying to answer in your essay? Why is this question important to you and to your readers?

##### Beginning by Stating a Position

When you are writing an argumentative essay, you may decide to begin by stating your position in the first paragraph. When you state your position, however, you need to be sure to help your reader understand the context for your argument. Your thinking about this topic did not spring from nowhere: why is this topic important to you? Why should it interest your readers?

## Beginning by Offering Background

If your readers may be unfamiliar with the topic about which you are writing, your introductory paragraph may serve to give them necessary background. Sometimes that background can summarize the results of other people's writing about the topic. Sometimes background information can place your topic in a larger context.

## Beginning by Defining

Whenever you present an essay to readers, you want to be sure that you and your readers are defining terms in the same way. Starting out by defining key terms may be useful when those terms are confusing or able to be misread.

## Beginning by Illustrating

An illustration, example, or anecdote can be an effective way of generating your readers' interest in your essay. Vivid details, suspenseful narrative, or interesting descriptions can make your reader want to continue reading. Illustrations, however, should relate to the focus of your essay.

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The development of an introduction can be determined by the following parts, which move from the general to the specific. Though an introduction often takes the form of a single paragraph in a short essay, this is by no means a hard and fast rule. Regardless if one uses a single paragraph or three paragraphs, the introduction should be proportionately no more than one-fifth of the overall essay.

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>GENERAL:</b> Introduce readers to a general subject in relation to your essay's topic; provide a "hook" to interest readers to read further.
<b>TEXT</b>	<b>NARROWER:</b> Announce the topic of your essay as a more specific issue within the general subject. (In response essays, this is where the text is introduced for the first time by way of the author's full name; the author's authority and/or credentials; the essay's full title in quotation marks; and the author's thesis or position in paraphrase). Narrow the scope of your topic by stating or implying an attitude about it.
<b>SUBTEXT</b>	<b>SPECIFIC:</b> Assert your central claim, or thesis requiring the remaining essay to provide or support that claim; forecast an organizational and developmental strategy for the essay that will follow. (In response essays, this is where you state your agreement or disagreement with the author, or add your own position or perspective as requested by the topic.)

## 2. BODY PARAGRAPHS

A typical body paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If it begins with a one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas.

The number of body paragraphs to which a writer should dedicate her essay development is often debated. In a rigidly structured five-paragraph essay, three body paragraphs develop three points implicitly raised in the thesis. This, however, should be regarded as a *minimal* number, but not necessarily an *optimal* number; or, to look at it in another manner, three body paragraphs are the *least* development expected of you because your thesis should bear enough complexity to warrant at least three points of further discussion.

Because body paragraphs do the work of building the essay's argument, they are defined most by the kind of support they use, which in turn classifies the kind of paragraph you are writing by its developmental structure. Typically, body paragraphs organize themselves around the following pattern of development.

<b>TOPIC</b>	In a topic sentence or two, offer a claim of fact, assert a point or opinion (claim of value), or suggest a course of action (claim of policy)
<b>EXPLANATION</b>	In a sentence or two, expand the topic by defining or redefining terms, or by discussing the nuances and complexities of the topic assertion
<b>SUPPORT</b>	Using a clear pattern of development, introduce evidence that illustrates or verifies the topic assertion.
<b>INTERPRETATION</b>	In a sentence or two, state what you feel is the relevance of your support to your topic point
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Reiterate the topic assertion as a consequence of support and interpretation; introduce verbal or logical bridges to the topic of the next paragraph.

### 3. CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Your concluding paragraph should give your readers a sense of closure or completion. Very often, your concluding paragraph will develop naturally as you finish writing your body paragraphs. You should, however, keep the following guidelines in mind as you develop your concluding paragraph:

- If you are using a flashback organizational pattern for the narrative paper, are you returning the reader to the "present"?
- In the narrative paper and in the process paper, are you ending with an explanation of a lesson learned or insight gained?
- In the definition paper, are you returning to a more general discussion of the concept or event you are defining, emphasizing the value that this concept or event holds for you in your personal culture?
- In the argumentation paper, are you EITHER pulling all of your arguments from the body paragraphs together into one convincing concluding argument OR restating, in a new and fresh way, the main point that the arguments in the body paragraph support?

You should avoid doing the following in concluding paragraphs. While there are those that believe the first two, especially, are necessary in argumentation papers, these techniques can take a fairly good paper and turn it into BAD writing. Be sure that your concluding paragraph exemplifies the same kind of careful consideration during development that your body paragraphs do.

- AVOID restating the thesis statement from the introductory paragraph in exactly the same words
- AVOID listing the main points of each of the body paragraph
- AVOID introducing an entirely new topic

Once you have written your concluding paragraph, reread your thesis statement. Has your paper strayed from the original thesis? Do you need to rewrite the thesis statement, the concluding paragraph, or both? A common freshman writing error is letting the paper develop naturally to its conclusion, even if it strays from the thesis, then submitting the paper without making sure that the thesis statement and the conclusion express the same opinion. Don't be afraid to change your thesis statement to reflect the main idea of the paper that you have written, but do be sure that the rest of the paper supports that final thesis statement.

Once you have written your concluding paragraph and you know what your paper is really about, it's time to work on the introductory paragraph.

# COHERENCY

Coherency is the trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges (i.e., transitions).

logical bridges:

- The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence
- Successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form

verbal bridges:

- Key words can be repeated in several sentences
- Synonymous words can be repeated in several sentences
- Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences
- Transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences

## THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Although not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and despite the fact that topic sentences can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle), an easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph. (This is a good general rule for less experienced writers, although it is not the only way to do it).

## PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Again, this varies from paragraph to paragraph, depending on the author's purpose, but writers should beware of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It's a pretty good bet that the paragraph is not fully developed if it is that short.

Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed by one of three kinds of support:

### AUTHORITATIVE

<b>Testimony</b>	Rely on what other credible people <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• say is factual</li><li>• offer as valuable opinion, or</li><li>• suggest what ought to be done</li></ul>
<b>Expert Opinion</b>	Quote experts and scholars to corroborate or challenge opinion

### SUBSTANTATIVE

<b>Signification</b>	To cite and interpret data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
<b>Classification-Division</b>	To segregate ideas or topics into categories that can be analyzed in closer detail
<b>Exemplification (Illustration)</b>	To use a pattern of examples and a longer illustration, followed by interpretation
<b>Process</b>	To offer a chronology of an event or a procedure (time segments)
<b>Cause-Effect</b>	To evaluate causes and reasons; examine effects and consequences
<b>Comparison-Contrast</b>	To compare or contrast traits and arguments between two or more related subjects
<b>Analogy</b>	Use of concrete details of one subject to clarify or suggest the abstract details of another unrelated subject; draw a metaphorical comparison
<b>Argumentation</b>	Use of rhetorical devices based in logic (deductive and inductive reasoning) in order to convince others to take a position

## MOTIVATIONAL

<b>Description</b>	Describe the topic with sensory detail and figurative language to convey a mood or an attitude
<b>Narration</b>	Use an anecdote or story to illustrate a point
<b>Definition</b>	Define terms in the paragraph to reflect values or agendas
<b>Interpretive Analysis</b>	Analyze the topic to convey a perspective, a philosophy or an impression
<b>Persuasion</b>	Use rhetorical devices based in emotion and character in order to convince others to take a position