

HOW TO WRITE PARAGRAPHS

At first, this may seem like a simple topic to broach; however, being able to compose good paragraphs is not only vital in regard to writing coherency and flow, but helps you as a writer to stay on track and keep focused.

■ What is a paragraph?

In short, a paragraph is a collection of sentences that are concerned with the same topic. They thereby allow you to organize your ideas, and provide a clear thread to the topic you're dealing with throughout your writing.

There's no sentence – or even word length – to a paragraph: it should be as long as required to make sense. However, academics are known to push for certain lengths, primarily to assist students in disciplining their writing style.

■ One idea per paragraph rule

A general rule is to keep **one idea to one paragraph**. If you find yourself discussing a new idea, make a new paragraph. For instance, if you have an idea and with this idea you include supporting evidence, this is one paragraph. If you have a number of concepts connected to one idea, you can include these in one paragraph, as long as each concept doesn't start to become too long and then, perhaps, require its own paragraph.

■ Main components of a paragraph

▶ Topic sentence

Although this doesn't have to be the first sentence of your paragraph, it should at least be near the beginning of it (although, of course, this is not the only way to do it). It's like a summary, allowing your reader to understand what the focus of the paragraph will be. The topic sentence should make clear how this paragraph connects to the main argument, and all other sentences in the paragraph should connect to it in some way.

▶ Explaining and supporting sentences

Subsequent sentences should explain and support the predominant idea and thinking behind your topic sentence. In order to achieve this, you could include:

- specific facts, figures and data from sound sources
- interpretations and analysis of the evidence

▶ Final sentences

As you come to the end of a paragraph, you should tie in again with your main hypothesis. You can use the final line to introduce your reader to the next paragraph or section.

■ What your paragraph should include

- ▶ **Focus:** this means that it shouldn't start to move into other areas halfway through, or be a mish-mash of ideas.
- ▶ **Coherence:** the concepts you include should function together. The sentences used should flow and progress in a way that coherently explains and discusses the main idea.
- ▶ **Development:** you should make sure that the idea you're focusing on in the paragraph is explained and discussed well. In this respect, if your paragraph is only a couple of sentences long, you might need to develop it further.

■ When to start a new paragraph

- ▶ **Starting a new idea or aspect of an idea:** as stated before, each time you begin a new idea, start a new paragraph. If your idea requires an extended explanation, then each new aspect should consist of its own paragraph.
- ▶ **Contrasting ideas or arguments:** you can add clarity to discussions by placing different ideas or arguments into different paragraphs.
- ▶ **Creating a pause:** one way to approach paragraphs is to view them as pauses for your reader. This allows your writing to flow, making it easier to follow.
- ▶ **Writing your introduction or conclusion:** these parts should always be granted their own paragraphs