

Paragraph Structure – What is a paragraph?

Structure of a paragraph

1. **Claim** - Arguable statement about the text
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2. **Evidence** - examples or quotes you use to prove your claim
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3. **Analysis** - where you take apart, explore, or explain your evidence for readers, showing why it proves what you say it does, and what the significance of your point is.
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Paragraph – The unit of a single idea

- The paragraph break communicates to your reader that you have just finished with one idea, and are on to the next.
- Another way of thinking about a paragraph is as a way of thoroughly working through this single idea, rather than just asserting it. Writing isn't just about convincing your readers, after all; it is also about working through your ideas for yourself, and better developing them in the process.

Length

There are no hard and fast rules about paragraph length, because they should be as long or as short as they need to be to communicate your idea. In general, however, it should not take more than a page to communicate that single idea. If you have a paragraph longer than a page, that is probably a sign you have more ideas in there that you need to break into separate paragraphs and develop individually.

Common Problems with Paragraphs

- **Structure** can present a major problem in paragraphs. Often, all the information you need will be in your paragraph when it is in draft form, but you haven't organized it in the "Claims, Evidence, Analysis" structure.
- **Putting the evidence first** - Because evidence from the text is what is compelling you to write in the first place, students sometimes put their evidence first in a paragraph. However, it is important that your readers understand what you are trying to prove with your evidence from the beginning of your paragraph. Otherwise, they will not know what they should be getting out of the evidence you provide.
- **Not enough evidence or not specific enough** – There are two main ways to have not enough evidence—by centering your paragraph around only one piece of evidence. This usually causes you to make an impoverished claim that basically restates the evidence itself. The other way to have too little evidence is to have evidence that is too general. If you make a generalization about something that happens several times, you need to be able to refer to a few **specific** instances where this happens. Moreover, each piece of evidence should add something to the paragraph. It is unlikely that each bridge instance

performs exactly the same function in the show, so each instance you refer to should help you develop or complicate your idea of how bridges function in the show.

- **Analysis that restates the claim, or takes the evidence as self-evident** – This problem is related to the one before, because they are both signs that the thinking you are doing in your paragraph is underdeveloped. If your analysis sounds just like your claim, or if you think your evidence proves the claim in itself with no analysis needed, read the whole paragraph through again. If it is true that the evidence you give needs no analysis, you are probably not actually making a claim. Remember that a claim--like a thesis—is an arguable statement. If it doesn't take work to prove it, that means it is not an arguable claim.
- **Summary rather than analysis** – If you find yourself giving long explanations of what happens in the plot, you might be falling into summarizing rather than analyzing the show.

Paragraph break-down:

Fundamentally, every good, solid paragraph in a paper makes a single claim related to the thesis that it wishes to prove true. The Monmouth University writing lab developed an excellent and effective explanation for what a paragraph is composed of. Their website reads, "A paragraph is a group of sentences that fleshes out a single idea. In order for a paragraph to be effective, it must begin with a topic sentence, have sentences that support the main idea of that paragraph, and maintain a consistent flow." Relying on this definition, sentences must be constructed with intention and in a cohesive manner in order to prove the claim of the overall paper true. Putting erroneous information into a paragraph takes away from the focus and distracts the reader from the message. Overall, each paragraph in your paper should work together to convey a single meaning and support the claim.

- Claim
- Contextual information about the evidence
- Evidence
- Analysis
- Concluding sentence
- Transition and introductory words and phrases