

Definition

A paragraph is a group of related sentences that support one main idea. In general, paragraphs consist of three parts: the topic sentence, body sentences, and the concluding or the bridge sentence to the next paragraph or section of the paper. Paragraphs show where the subdivisions of a research paper begin and end and, thus, help the reader see the organization of the essay and grasp its main points in relation to the research problem.

Arnaudet, Martin L. and Mary Ellen Barrett. *Paragraph Development: A Guide for Students of English*. 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1990; Rahman, Mohidur. "The Essentials of Paragraph Writing to Develop Writing Skill." *Global Journal of Human Social Science: Linguistics and Education* 22 (2022).

Importance of Constructing Good Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the building blocks of papers. Without well-written paragraphs that flow logically from one idea to the next and that inform and help support understanding of the research problem being investigated, your paper will not be viewed as credible by the reader. More than simply a collection of sentences, a paragraph must possess a controlling idea [i.e., the thinking strategy, opinion, or attitude that provides a framework from which to interpret the author's position concerning the research problem]. The paragraph should then explain the idea in a structurally coherent way and be sufficiently developed to inform the reader about that idea in a way that transitions naturally into the next paragraph or section of your paper.

Below are common problems with developing effective paragraphs:

1. **The paragraph has no controlling idea.** Imagine each paragraph as having three general layers of text. The core content is in the middle. It includes all the evidence you need to make the point. However, this evidence needs to be introduced by a topic sentence or your readers will not know what to do with all the evidence you have given them. Therefore, the beginning of the paragraph explains the controlling idea of the paragraph. The last part of the paragraph tells the reader how the paragraph relates to the broader argument and provides a transition to the next idea. Once you have mastered the use of topic sentences, you may decide that the topic sentence for a particular paragraph really should not be the first sentence of the paragraph. This is fine—the topic sentence can actually go at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph; what is important is that it is there to inform readers what the main idea of the paragraph is and how it relates back to the broader topic of your paper.
2. **The paragraph has more than one controlling idea.** This is the most common reason why a paragraph is too lengthy. If a paragraph is more than a page long, it likely contains more than one controlling idea. In this case, consider eliminating sentences that relate to the second idea, with the thought that these statements do not inform and help support the research problem, or if this information is important, split the paragraph into two or more paragraphs, each with only one controlling idea.
3. **Transitional statement is missing.** In academic writing, most paragraphs include a transition from one paragraph to the next paragraph because research writing often addresses complex and multilayered topics that require in-depth explanations and analysis. The transition ensures that there is a logical sequence of thoughts, ideas, and arguments within your paper. A transitional statement can be one or two sentences that helps establish relationships between controlling ideas and create a logical progression

of those ideas throughout the paper. Transitions are especially important at the end of paragraphs that discuss multiple examples, explain complex issues or concepts, or at the end of each section of your paper [e.g., introduction to literature review].

Arnaudet, Martin L. and Mary Ellen Barrett. *Paragraph Development: A Guide for Students of English*. 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1990; Paragraph Development: Importance of Constructing Good Paragraphs. AP English Literature and Composition. Edublogs, 2012; Paragraphing. Centre for Applied Linguistics. University of Warwick; Hicks, Rodney W. "Tips for New and Experienced Authors: Focus on the Paragraph." *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners* 32 (October 2020): 639-641.

Structure and Writing Style

I. General Structure

Most paragraphs in an essay parallel the general three-part structure of each section of a research paper and, by extension, the overall research paper, with an introduction, a body that includes facts and analysis, and a conclusion. You can see this structure in paragraphs whether they are narrating, describing, comparing, contrasting, or analyzing information. Each part of the paragraph plays an important role in communicating the meaning you intend to convey to the reader.

Introduction: the first section of a paragraph; should include the topic sentence and any other sentences at the beginning of the paragraph that give background information or provide a transition.

Body: follows the introduction; discusses the controlling idea, using facts, arguments, analysis, examples, and other information.

Conclusion: the final section; summarizes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph's controlling idea. For long paragraphs, you may also want to include a bridge sentence that introduces the next paragraph or section of the paper. In some instances, the bridge sentence can be written in the form of a question. However, use this rhetorical device sparingly, otherwise, ending a lot of paragraphs with a question to lead into the next paragraph sounds cumbersome.

NOTE: This general structure does not imply that you should not be creative in your writing. Arranging where each element goes in a paragraph can make a paper more engaging for the reader. However, do not be too creative in experimenting with the narrative flow of paragraphs. To do so may distract from the main arguments of your research and weaken the quality of your academic writing.