`\looseness` [⟨*number*⟩ parameter]

This parameter gives you a way to change the total number of lines in a paragraph from what they optimally would be. `\looseness` is so named because it's a measure of how loose the paragraph is, i.e., how much extra space there is in it.

Normally, `\looseness` is 0 and TEX chooses line breaks in its usual way. But if `\looseness` is, say, 3, TEX does the following:

1) It chooses line breaks normally, resulting in a paragraph of n lines.
2) It discards these line breaks and tries to find a new set of line breaks that gives the paragraph $n + 3$ lines. (Without the previous step, TEX wouldn't know the value of n.)
3) If the previous attempt results in lines whose badness exceeds `\tolerance`, it tries to get $n + 2$ lines—and if that also fails, $n + 1$ lines, and finally n lines again.

Similarly, if looseness is $-n$, TEX attempts to set the paragraph with n fewer lines than normal. The easiest way for TEX to make a paragraph one line longer is to put a single word on the excess line. You can prevent this by putting a tie (p. '`@not`') between the last two words of the paragraph.

Setting `\looseness` is the best way to force a paragraph to occupy a given number of lines. Setting it to a negative value is useful when you're trying to increase the amount of text you can fit on a page. Similarly, setting it to a positive value is useful when you're trying to decrease the amount of text on a page.

TEX sets `\looseness` to 0 when it ends a paragraph, after breaking the paragraph into lines. If you want to change the looseness of several paragraphs, you must do it individually for each one or put the change into `\everypar` (p. '`\everypar`').