

Paragraph Development

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover paragraphs—what they're meant to do, how they're constructed, and what purpose each sentence fulfills. The specific areas of focus include:

1. How Long is a Paragraph?
2. Paragraphs in Academic Writing
3. Paragraph Components
 - 3a. Topic Sentence
 - 3b. Supporting Sentences
 - 3c. Concluding Sentence

1. How Long is a Paragraph?

Paragraphs are the organizational units of most writing. Like the rooms that make up a house, paragraphs vary in size depending on their purpose. In a house, a room (like a closet) might be quite small and still perfectly functional. Similarly, a paragraph can be one sentence and still serve its purpose.

Consider the following:

I had my life all figured out. I would finish college with a degree in business. I would find a good job in a Fortune 500 company. I would earn my MBA at night while working my way up the corporate ladder. Somehow in my "free time," I would meet a perfect partner and get married. We would settle down in a nice house in the suburbs a short distance from the city. We would have a big goofy dog named Clive and a nice big yard where he could run around. Maybe later there would be kids running around in that yard as well.

Those plans did not include cancer, but cancer had plans for me.

In this case, the one-sentence paragraph delivers an impact that might be lost if it was part of a longer paragraph. However, this sentence wouldn't work as an entire paragraph unless the essay were about something else entirely.

Maybe later there would be kids running around in that yard as well.

Short paragraphs are far more common (and thus more acceptable) in personal writing and creative writing than in academic writing. In academic writing, paragraphs are usually several sentences long. The following sections focus on this style of writing.

2. Paragraphs in Academic Writing

Most paragraphs in academic writing will be made up of several sentences, which focus on one governing idea. When the writer is ready to move on to the next idea, they move on to the next paragraph.

Most paragraphs should have:

- A topic sentence
- Some supporting sentences
- A concluding sentence

If you're going to write a paragraph, it's useful to make a quick paragraph outline that includes a list of each point that paragraph needs to make in brief and in the order that you'll want to write it.

↪ **EXAMPLE** If you wanted to write a very short paragraph about why people love sandwiches, you might make an outline like this:

1. *Topic sentence: people love sandwiches because they're versatile.*
2. *Supporting sentences: (1) any kind of bread, (2) any kind of filling, (3) any time of day*
3. *Concluding sentence: Sandwiches are thus versatile in form and function.*

See how each point is mentioned, but the details haven't been filled in yet? That's how a good and quick outline will look.



TERM TO KNOW

Paragraph

A collection of sentences within a piece of writing, connected by a single focusing idea.

3. Paragraph Components

That outline can then be broken down piece by piece to evaluate what each element does.

As mentioned previously, each paragraph will have three things:

- Topic sentence

- Supporting sentences
- Concluding sentence

Looking at a sample paragraph can help you see how each of those elements functions in action. You'll be referring to the following paragraph as you continue to closely examine the three components throughout the remainder of this lesson:

One might surmise that people love sandwiches because of how versatile they are. Sandwiches can be made on any kind of bread, from a tortilla to rye to white. Moreover, they can include virtually any filling, making them easy for vegetarians, meat lovers, and anyone else. And since they can be made to each person's desires, they can also be enjoyed at any time of the day, using breakfast staples like eggs in the morning or heartier fare for dinner. Thus, sandwiches are both versatile in form and function, proving that just about anyone can love them.

3a. Topic Sentence

The paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**, which is a sentence expressing the main idea of a paragraph. This is usually the first sentence.

One might surmise that people love sandwiches because of how versatile they are.

See how it explicitly states the main purpose or idea that you know the paragraph is going to cover?



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Topic Sentence

A sentence expressing the main idea of a paragraph.

3b. Supporting Sentences

Then you have the **supporting sentences**. Those will each do something slightly different; however, as a group, they are the sentences of a paragraph that offer:

- Examples
- Explanation
- Detail
- Analysis

In general, each of the supporting sentences offers something that supports the main idea without just repeating that main idea. They'll add more new and important information that will help develop the main idea.

Sandwiches can be made on any kind of bread, from a tortilla to rye to white. Moreover, they can include virtually any filling, making them easy for vegetarians, meat lovers, and anyone else. And since they can be

made to each person's desires, they can also be enjoyed at any time of the day, using breakfast staples like eggs in the morning or heartier fare for dinner.

See how each of the three sentences from the above paragraph adds a new piece of support for that main idea?



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Supporting Sentences

The sentences of a paragraph that offer examples, explanation, detail, and analysis to develop the idea presented in the topic sentence.

3c. Concluding Sentence

Finally, most lengthy paragraphs will end with a **concluding sentence**, which is a sentence that either summarizes the paragraph or creates a transition to the next paragraph.

If a paragraph is all on its own, it needs a sentence to conclude it by summarizing and reprising its info. If the paragraph is very short, it may not need much conclusion.

Thus sandwiches are both versatile in form and function, proving that just about anyone can love them.

In general, the concluding sentence will look like this one does. Note that this sentence does not just rehash the topic sentence. Instead, it adds something new to the paragraph by reminding the reader of how the supporting sentences help support the main idea that the topic sentence presents.



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Concluding Sentence

A sentence that either summarizes the paragraph or creates a transition to the next paragraph.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned **what a paragraph is**: a collection of sentences within a piece of writing, connected by a single focusing idea. Paragraphs are usually part of longer pieces of writing, such as books or essays.

You also learned about the **components of a paragraph**: **topic sentence**, **supporting sentences**, and **concluding sentence**. The topic sentence tells you what the paragraph is about. The supporting sentences offer examples, explanation, detail, and analysis of the main idea. Finally, the concluding sentence either summarizes the paragraph or provides a smooth transition to the next paragraph.

Good luck!



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Concluding Sentence

A sentence that either summarizes the paragraph or creates a transition to the next paragraph.

Paragraph

A collection of sentences within a piece of writing, connected by a single focusing idea.

Supporting Sentences

The sentences of a paragraph that offer examples, explanation, detail, and analysis to develop the idea presented in the topic sentence.

Topic Sentence

A sentence expressing the main idea of a paragraph.