



# STRUCTURE OF A PARAGRAPH

Paragraphs are sometimes described as a writer's building blocks and a reader's signposts. They serve an important function in logically developing your ideas. There are many ways to write a good paragraph. This handout describes a conventional, academic paragraph structure.

A good piece of academic writing (an essay, for example) has both a clear overall structure and a clear internal paragraph structure. A reader should, in most cases, be able to understand the overall argument of an essay simply by reading the introduction, conclusion and topic sentence of each body paragraph.

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph, sometimes the second sentence. The topic sentence should never be buried in the middle of the paragraph.

## The point of a paragraph

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A paragraph is a sequence of sentences that expresses and develops one main topic, point, or idea.

## The elements of a paragraph

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As well as stating the main idea (in the topic sentence), a paragraph discusses the idea in two or more additional sentences. These additional sentences often contain examples or evidence to support or illustrate the main idea. The examples or evidence usually come from an academic or other source which should be properly referenced. The writer should explain HOW this evidence helps answer the assignment question.

This may help you to remember the elements of a paragraph:

- T**      topic sentence which states paragraph's main idea
- E**      explanation or expansion
- E**      examples, illustration or supporting evidence
- L**      link between main idea and the evidence given in the paragraph

## The other functions of paragraphs

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Paragraphs can have other functions besides developing one main topic. They can also:

- introduce the essay or major sections of the essay
- move the reader from one section of the essay to another (transitional paragraphs)
- conclude the essay

## Length of paragraphs

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Paragraph length varies depending on what you have to say. It is uncommon to write paragraphs of fewer than three or four sentences (about 90+ words). Paragraphs are often up to 200 words in length.

If you have written a very long paragraph (250 words or more) it can become easy for you, as the writer to lose your way. This will make it harder for your reader to follow your reasoning. See if you can either make it more concise or find a natural break to make it into two.

## Linking paragraphs

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Linking paragraphs together makes written work flow smoothly and this makes it easier for the reader to follow your line of thought. You can link paragraphs together by:

- using signal words such as: *therefore, in addition, another, despite*
- using linking sentences or phrases at the beginning and/or end of a paragraph

## Making a paragraph visually obvious

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Making paragraphs visually obvious to the reader is very important. It signals the introduction of a new idea. You can make a new paragraph visually obvious in either of the following ways:

- by indenting the first line
- by missing out a line between paragraphs

## A good paragraph

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A good paragraph has the following characteristics:

- it develops one topic or main point/idea
- it is linked to the paragraphs immediately before and after it
- it is visually obvious to the reader



### Related resources:

[Structure of an essay](#)

[Introductions and conclusions](#)

[Linking words and phrases](#)

[All study resources](#)

