



Building Paragraphs

Sentences and Sentence Patterns

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The Excellent Paragraph

What Is a Paragraph?

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Learning to write good paragraphs will help you as a writer stay on track during your drafting and revision stages. Good paragraphing also greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing. You can have fantastic ideas, but if those ideas aren't presented in an organized fashion, you will lose your readers (and fail to achieve your goals in writing).

The Basic Rule: Keep One Idea to One Paragraph

The basic rule of paragraphing is to keep one idea to one paragraph. If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and several bits of supporting evidence within a single paragraph. You can also have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph. If the single points start to get long, then perhaps elaborating on each of them and placing them in their own paragraph is the route to go.

Elements of a Paragraph

To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following:

Unity - The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If it begins with one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another focus or different idea.

Coherence - The trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges. A logical bridge is when the same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence. A verbal bridge is when key words or synonymous words are repeated in several sentences and transition words link those ideas from sentence to sentence.

A Topic Sentence – A sentence that indicates in a general way the idea or thesis of the paragraph. Although not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and despite the fact that topic sentences can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle), an easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph.

Adequate Development - The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Again, this varies from paragraph to paragraph, depending on the author's purpose, but writers should beware of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences.

Methods to Develop a Paragraph

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic

- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)

Beginning a New Paragraph

A new paragraph should be started:

- When you begin a new idea or point. New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
- To contrast information or ideas. Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
- When your readers need a pause. Breaks in paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in will help your writing become more readable. You would create a break if the paragraph becomes too long or the material is complex.
- When you are ending your introduction or starting your conclusion. Your introductory and concluding material should always be in a new paragraph. Many introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose.

Transitions and Signposts

Two very important elements of paragraphing are transitions and signposts. Transitions are usually one or several sentences that "transition" from one idea to the next. Transitions can be used at the end of most paragraphs to help one paragraph flow one into the next. Think of transitions as bridges from one point to the next point. Signposts are internal aids to assist readers; they usually consist of several sentences or a paragraph outlining what the article has covered and where the article will be going.

Transitional Expressions

Logical Relationship	Transitional Expressions
Similarity	also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly
Exception/Contrast	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet
Sequence/Order	first, second, third, ... next, then, finally
Time	after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then
Example	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate
Emphasis	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
Place/Position	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
Additional Support or Evidence	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
Conclusion/Summary	finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary

Paragraphing (Length Consistency)

Paragraphs are units of thought with one idea developed adequately. Listed here are some rules of thumb for beginning writers.

- Put only one main idea per paragraph.
- Aim for three to five or more sentences per paragraph.
- Include on each page about two handwritten or three typed paragraphs.
- Make your paragraphs proportional to your paper. Since paragraphs do less work in short papers, have short paragraphs for short papers and longer paragraphs for longer papers.
- If you have a few very short paragraphs, think about whether they are really parts of a larger paragraph—and can be combined—or whether you can add details to support each point and thus make each into a more fully developed paragraph.

How to Organize an Excellent Paragraph

1. Start your paragraph with a topic sentence.

Topic sentence – a sentence that explains what you are going to write about. It should have a subject, a verb, and a controlling idea.

2. Add **supporting sentences**.

Supporting sentences – more information about your topic. One way to do this is to imagine your topic sentence as a question and then ask yourself: How can I prove this is true? What examples can I give?

3. End with a **concluding sentence**.

Conclusion – an ending sentence that explains what your paragraph is about. If you want to, you can add a concluding comment after the concluding sentence.

Using Patterns to Develop Paragraphs – Better Paragraphs Using Mathematical Formulas

The following is a method to visually teach the steps in writing a paragraph. It provides students with a framework and allows them to plug into each area of a model to be copied.

Sample Lesson Plan Process for Writing a Better Paragraph

Session One

Introduce the concept of steps in writing paragraphs. Define topic sentence, detail sentences, concluding sentences. Use examples from authentic materials or use those from textbooks.

Assign a topic for students to write a paragraph as a pretest model. A topic should be generic. Keep this paragraph for use later in the process.

Session Two

Explain that numbers can help us to be organized. Examples: putting shopping items in a list, numbering off for games, sorting items for the book shelf or game tables, a time schedule for classes, voting. Model other ways to organize ideas for writing, such as a concept web or map. Discuss ways to improve the map you have created.

Session Three

Introduce 1-2-3-4-0 paragraph format.

Write several on the overhead or board and ask for student input. Give students a blank model and ask them to write a 1-2-3-4-0 paragraph.

A topic that fits easily is "Three Reasons I Like or Dislike _____"

Session Four

Introduce 1-2-2-2-0 paragraph format. This is different because it asks for 3 details that are about the same topic. This is a more refined paragraph that describes one area. You may wish to use the topic from the previous day and have students expand one detail from that paragraph.

Session Five

Introduce the longer paragraph format 1-2-2A-2-2B-2-2C-0. The previous paragraph may be useable. To complete, have students fill in the previous sessions' sentences and expand on the ideas.

Model a new 1-2-2-2-0 paragraph to use for the next session.

Session Six

Review 1-2-2-2-0 and 1-2-2A-2-2B-2-2C-0 formats with the students. Have students use the 1-2-2-2-0 paragraph that you developed and have them expand it into a 1-2-2A-2-2B-2-2C-0.

Session Seven and Future Sessions

Discuss other versions of the paragraph format. For example a 1-2-3-4-0 could have further support sentences written into the format. Quickly generate a 1-2-2A-3-3A-4-4A-0 paragraph.

It is suggested that you assign paragraph types as an on-going follow-up. They could be quick writes, homework or class work. They could also be assigned in different content areas, because standardized tests in all content areas require constructed responses. A group that had this strategy as a background would be able to construct paragraphs of a format that fit these criteria.

Arranging Sentences into Paragraphs – An Overview of the Pattern System

1 = Topic sentence

2 = Supporting detail sentence

2A, 2B, 2C, etc. = further or additional support for the detail in 2

3, 4, and 5 = different supporting details

0 = Concluding sentence

1-2-3-4-0 = 1 topic, 3 different details (2, 3, 4), concluding sentence

1-2-2-2-0 = 1 topic, 3 details, concluding sentence

1-2-2A-2-2B-2-2C-0 = 1 topic, 3 details, each with a further support, concluding sentence

1-2-2A-3-3A-4-4A-0 = 1 topic, 3 different details, 3 further support details (2A, 3B, and 4B), concluding sentence

Writing Frame for Five Sentence Paragraph

Pattern 1-2-3-4-0

Topic Sentence	
Detail #1	
Detail #2	
Detail #3	
Concluding Sentence	

Writing Frame for Five Sentence Paragraph

Pattern 1-2-2-2-0

Topic Sentence	
Supporting Detail #1	
Supporting Detail #2	
Supporting Detail #3	
Concluding Sentence	

Writing Frame for a Longer Paragraph**Pattern: 1-2-2A-2-2B-2-2C-0**

Topic Sentence	
Supporting Detail (2)	
Support for Detail (2A)	
Supporting Detail (2)	
Support for Detail (2B)	
Supporting Detail (2)	
Support for Detail (2C)	
Concluding Sentence	

Writing Frame for a Longer Paragraph**Pattern: 1-2-2B-3-3B-4-4B-0**

Topic Sentence	
Detail Sentence 2	
Further Support of Detail 2B	
Detail Sentence 3	
Further Support of Detail 3B	
Detail Sentence 4	
Further Support of Detail 4B	
Concluding Sentence	

Revising and Editing Paragraphs

Check your paragraph using the following checklist.

Topic Sentences

- What is the topic sentence of each paragraph, and is it stated or implied?
- Where in the paragraph does it appear?

- Should it come at some other point?
- Would any paragraph be improved by deleting or adding a topic sentence?
- What is the most general sentence in each paragraph?
- If the most general sentence is not the topic sentence, should it remain or be omitted?

Supporting Details

- Which sentences, if any, do not relate in some way to the topic sentence?
- Is there any way to justify their inclusion?

Organization

- Is each paragraph organized in a way that is easy for readers to follow?
- By what means are sentences linked in each paragraph?
- Do any more links need to be added?
- Do any of the transitional expressions try to create links that do not really exist between ideas?

Development

- How completely does each paragraph develop its topic sentence?
- What methods of development are used, and are they effective?
- What other methods might be used?
- Does the paragraph need more material?

Length and Variety

- How long is each paragraph?
- Are paragraphs varied in length?
- Does any paragraph seem too long (e.g. an entire page) or too short (e.g. one sentence)?
- Is there anything that might be given strong emphasis by a one-sentence paragraph?

Cohesion

- By what means are paragraphs linked together?
- Do any more links need to be added?
- Do any of the transitional expressions try to create links that do not really exist between ideas?

First Paragraph

- How does the introductory paragraph catch the interest of the readers?
- How exactly does it open - with a quotation? an anecdote? a question? a strong statement?
- How else might it open?

Last Paragraph

- How does the last paragraph draw the essay to a conclusion?
- What lasting impression will it leave with readers?

- How exactly does it close- with a question? a quotation? a vivid image? a warning or call to action?
- How else might this essay conclude?

Sample Paragraphs to Use in Writing Using Patterns

Chronological Order: 1-2-3-4-0

Chronological order is the order in which the events occurred, from first to last. This is the easiest pattern to write and to follow.

Example:

1. A baby is born helpless and learns to be more independent in time.
2. First, the baby learns to roll over and sit up.
3. Soon the baby can crawl.
4. Without the passage of much more time, the baby can walk and stand on its own two feet.
5. The helpless infant soon grows up to be a toddler.

Sample topics for generating a chronological paragraph (1-2-3-4-0):

- How to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- The steps in making a sports play, such as making a basket or catching a pass
- Retelling a favorite television show or movie
- How to get to a specific location

ARMS: An Easy Way to Revise

Don't forget to have students edit and revise their paragraphs. An easy technique to remember for revising any writing assignment is ARMS:

- **A**dd words, phrases, or more information to help make your points clear and easy for the reader to understand. Add transition words, phrase, or sentences to tie your thoughts and paragraphs together.
- **R**emove words that repeat themselves and information that does not relate to the main idea of your sentence, paragraph, or to the topic of the composition.
- **M**ove around words, phrases, sentences, or even whole paragraphs in order to keep your ideas clear and flowing toward a logical conclusion.
- **S**ubstitute words with more exact words or phrases that express what you want to say more clearly.