

Faculty of Community Services

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How to Structure a Paragraph

THE PARAGRAPH

- Paragraphs are distinct sections in a piece of writing
- They usually deal with a single theme and are indicated by a new line or an indentation
- Paragraphs help organize your essay based on the logical progression of ideas

HOW TO STRUCTURE A PARAGRAPH

1. Introduction: Topic sentence

- A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates what **idea or thesis** the paragraph proposing and explaining
- 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.
- Through the topic sentence, both you and your reader should be able to easily **summarize** the paragraph in question
- As you are editing your work, underline the topic sentence of each paragraph
 - If you can't, your essay may be difficult to **follow**
 - Every sentence in that paragraph should have something to do with the topic sentence. If they don't, move them to the right place or remove them

2. Body: Here you will discuss your paragraph's topic sentence, using various forms of evidence

- The topic should be discussed **in detail**
- Here are some ways to make sure you've covered your topic in detail:
 - **Describe** the topic
 - **Define terms** in the paragraph
 - Especially new terms, or terms with which you think your target audience may be unfamiliar
 - Provide **historical context**
 - **Analyze** the topic
 - Use **examples**
 - Cite **data**
 - Use **secondary sources**
 - Particularly academic sources
 - Use an **anecdote** or **story**
 - **Compare** and **contrast**
 - Evaluate **causes** and **reasons**
 - Examine **effects** and **consequences**
- Order your paragraphs so that each one follows **logically** from the previous one
- To make the logic more obvious, you can use **transition words**

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- The simplest way of indicating transition is by using words such similarly, likewise, by the same token, yet, nevertheless, however, etc.
- Or, you may use longer phrases such as “It is ironic, therefore, that...”

3. Conclusion:

Here you are commenting and drawing connections

- Your conclusion is an opportunity to wrap up the paragraph and reconnect to your topic sentence. You want to suggest that you have **proved** what you set out to do.
- In any given, singular paragraph, your concluding sentence should mirror your topic sentence, and add a final thought on this topic sentence.
- This approach closes the argument presented in your paragraph.

EXAMPLE: A WELL-STRUCTURED PARAGRAPH

(Modified from an essay discussing Bridget Jones' Diary)

This image of feminine beauty to which Bridget aspires, is one that has very much been commercially created. As Bridget herself says, “Wise people will say that Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of Cosmopolitan culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices” (Fielding, 59). In admitting this, Bridget is also admitting herself into the group of contemporary women who buy womanhood packaged in polished and glossy magazines such *Cosmopolitan*. Whelehan notes that these popular publications are good at making women want what they don’t have, and feel insecure about what they do: “They wish us to believe that our aspirations are attainable with just a little judicious remodeling and investment in the kinds of commodities advertised within their pages” (Whelehan, 26). This need to invest in commodities further underscores how the image of feminine beauty is impossible to obtain naturally, and has been created by consumer culture.

- The topic sentence (underlined) in this example introduces a thesis: that idealized beauty is commercially created
- The body of the paragraph discusses how this commercially created beauty ideal is apparent in the novel, using supporting evidence
- The concluding sentence of the paragraph both comments and draws connections (and can be used to lead into the essay’s next point)

Here are additional and valuable resources on structuring paragraphs (that were adapted for this handout):

Driscoll, D. L., & Brizee, A. *On paragraphs*. Retrieved from

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>

Paragraph structure. Retrieved from <http://academicwriting.wikidot.com/paragraph-structure>

The Write Site. *Typical structure of a paragraph*. Retrieved from

http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/m3/m3u2/m3u2s2/m3u2s2_1.htm