



Success Center Tips for Developing Effective Paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of sentences that focus on one main point. Paragraphs break writing into manageable parts, which is important for several reasons. Effective paragraphing shows the series of ideas a writer builds within an essay or research paper. Paragraphs also identify the organizational structure of the draft, making it easier to follow the writer's purpose, thesis, and supporting points. This structure enables writers to revise so that ideas are arranged clearly in the final draft of the paper.

Remember that although paragraph lengths may vary in an individual document, in general, paragraphs should be proportional to the paper's overall length, i.e., shorter papers tend to have shorter paragraphs, and longer papers may require longer, more complex paragraphs. Writers often alternate the length of paragraphs to fit their own style and purpose. For example, short paragraphs can sometimes be used for emphasis and to achieve rhythm.

The following guidelines will help you develop effective paragraphs to engage your readers and to make your writing more organized, focused, and clear.

An effective paragraph:

- Focuses on one main point or example
- Usually has a topic sentence that ties information together
- Contains sentences that all relate to or expand on a specific idea
- Presents ideas in a logical way to establish credibility
- Is well-developed with detail but not overly long
- Flows smoothly and uses transitional words and phrases
- Avoids repetition by using pronouns and synonyms to refer to similar ideas
- Guides readers with transitional sentences that act as verbal and logical bridges—referring back to a previous sentence or paragraph or ahead to the next

Transition to a new paragraph to:

- Provide a bridge between the introduction and the rest of the paper*
- Begin or elaborate on a new point
- Break up lengthy discussions or descriptions for readers
- Contrast ideas developed earlier
- Refute a claim or counter-argument
- Indicate a shift in time and place
- Change speakers in a dialogue
- Set up the conclusion to the paper*

***Note:** In a longer paper, the introduction and/or conclusion may be more than one paragraph.

Ways to organize paragraphs:

- From general to specific (starts with a general topic sentence, follows with details that explain)
- From specific to general (specific details lead to a final topic sentence that reveals an idea)
- Chronologically (time order)
- Spatially (present details as they appear in a specific location)

Special types of paragraphs:

Introductions and conclusions serve a special function in an essay or research paper; therefore, these paragraphs require special attention from the writer. The introduction specifies the writer's purpose and engages the reader's interest. The conclusion motivates readers to reconsider the writer's claims, or encourages them to take further action on the topic, and provides closure.

An effective introductory paragraph:

- Identifies and sets up the scope of the problem, topic, or claim
- Gets readers' attention and shows why the topic matters
- Contains a clear **thesis statement**—a promise to the reader of what to expect

An effective concluding paragraph:

- Reminds readers of your thesis in an emphatic way
- Does not simply restate the thesis from the introduction
- Stays focused on your topic and main ideas
- Provides satisfaction to readers and a sense of closure

Paragraph development techniques:

Purpose	Development Strategy
Tell a story; re-create events; present an anecdote	Narrating
Provide details of a scene or object; portray someone's character; evoke a feeling or sensory impression	Describing
Explore similarities or differences; evaluate options	Comparing and contrasting
Provide directions, provide results, explain a procedure, or report on a process	Explaining a process
Separate a subject into parts or divide people or objects into categories; explain the relationships among the groups	Dividing / Classifying
Explain the meaning of a term or concept; explore and illustrate the meaning of complex concepts	Defining
Consider why something happened or might happen; explore possible causes and consequences	Analyzing causes and effects