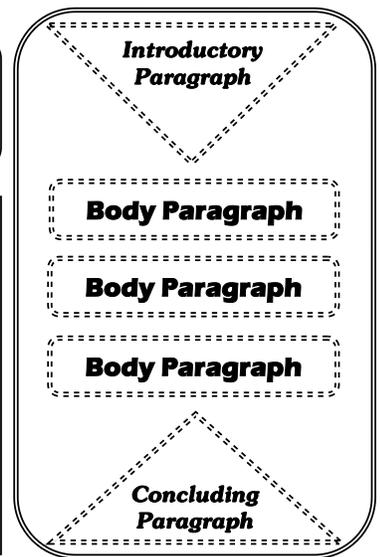


# Paragraphing

Let's say, after doing some preliminary writing, you've come up with a rough thesis statement for your essay. But now what? How should you go about writing the body of your paper—and what should be in it? If you're wrestling with your body paragraphs, it might be helpful to review some of the basics.

**BODY PARAGRAPHS:** As your paper moves from the introduction to the body, your body paragraphs will do the heavy lifting of your paper, working to expand, support and develop the points laid out in your introduction. As you write your body paragraphs, you should keep several things in mind:

- ❖ Rather than offering scant evidence, a good body paragraph will provide enough support to fully develop the paragraph's main point.
- ❖ Rather than wandering aimlessly among several points, a good body paragraph will stay focused on the point at hand—and in turn, will link back to the thesis statement of the paper.
- ❖ Rather than randomly or abruptly raising points, a good body paragraph will make sense within the paper as a whole and will tie smoothly to your other body paragraphs via strong transitions.



**THE TOPIC SENTENCE:** Just as your paper needs a thesis statement to focus and direct its argument, each body paragraph needs a topic sentence to focus its main idea. As you craft your topic sentences, keep these questions in mind:

- ❖ **Where have I placed my topic sentence?** Since the topic sentence is meant to provide focus, it should come at the start of the paragraph.
- ❖ **Is my topic sentence relevant to my thesis?** Aside from giving a paragraph structure, a good topic sentence also relates back to your paper's thesis statement. In the end, the purpose of your topic sentence is to further the argument set out in your thesis. So if your topic sentence veers off, you'll need to refocus the point you're making.
- ❖ **Does my topic sentence make a claim?** Topic sentences, like thesis statements, make a claim—one that can easily be backed up and expanded upon over the course of the entire paragraph. Thus, like a thesis, topic sentences are by their nature argumentative.
- ❖ **Does my topic sentence address a single point of my argument?** Your topic sentence should introduce a single point to be developed—rather than several points. If you're tackling too many ideas in your topic sentence, you should develop those ideas via additional paragraphs.
- ❖ **Does my topic sentence hold the rest of the paragraph together?** If your topic sentence doesn't relate to your supporting sentences, you'll need to revise it. (Note: also check if your supporting sentences are moving on to another idea. This may be the source of the problem.)

**SUPPORTING SENTENCES:** Just as you need body paragraphs to back up your thesis statement, you need supporting sentences to develop your topic sentence. Specifically, these sentences clarify, develop, and support your topic sentence via details, reasons, examples, statistics, facts, etc. With this in mind you might ask, "How much supporting material do I need?" or "How long should my paragraphs be?" A good paragraph should be as long as it needs to be to illustrate, explain, and prove the point of your topic sentence. In short, once you have enough supporting evidence to prove your claim, your paragraph is the appropriate length. However, as you work to fully develop your paragraph's main idea, you might consider a few guidelines: 1) avoid overkill. Too much detail may confuse readers—so get to the point; 2) avoid irrelevant sentences, i.e. material not related to or supportive of your topic sentence; 3) avoid repetition. Are you trying to support your topic sentence by just restating what you've already said? If so, move on; and 4) avoid vagueness. Is your supporting evidence too vague? Make sure your details, reasons, and examples are specific enough to clearly illustrate and explain your points.

Finally, your supporting sentences should not only expand on your topic sentence by explaining pertinent ideas, but should also tie to one another through transitional words or phrases. These words or phrases help to turn a paragraph from a list of ideas into a unified whole. Transitions may be used: a) to open up, or begin a paragraph; b) to tie ideas together; c) to change a line of reasoning, and/or; d) to sum up final points.

Transitional words and phrases like "obviously," "of course," "to begin with," "granted," "no doubt," "in general," and "certainly" are usually used to open up a paragraph or introduce a new idea. Words such as "consequently," "furthermore," "incidentally," "in addition," "moreover," "because," and "besides that" may be used to tie ideas together or continue a line of reasoning. However, if you are interested in contrasting one idea from another—or would like to change a line of reasoning—then words or phrases like "but," "yet," "in contrast," "on the other hand," "conversely," or "on the contrary" can be quite helpful. Finally, when it becomes necessary to end your paragraph—or to sum up your ideas—helpful words or phrases such as "in closing," "in summary," "in conclusion," "finally," or "therefore" can be quite handy.

## HOW TO CITE THIS HANDOUT:

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