

WRITING A PARAGRAPH

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a unit of thought which represents one clear idea. Paragraphs are formed through a series of sentences. In academic texts, most paragraphs will have at least four or five sentences. Thinking about the best way to organise these sentences in your paragraph is necessary if you want to present your ideas in a coherent, unified and logical manner.

TIP

The minimum length of a paragraph is approximately 5 lines. The maximum length would be half of an A4 page, however it is best to stop at around 10 lines.

Why are your paragraphs important?

A well-written paragraph develops a singular argument that builds to your central argument. Each paragraph should reveal new information.

When poorly composed, a paragraph is a set of loosely connected sentences. In essence, poor paragraphs *raise questions*; good ones *deal with them*.

TIP — Useful linking words and phrases

To add:

also, in addition, furthermore

To compare:

similarly, in the same way

To contrast:

however, on the other hand

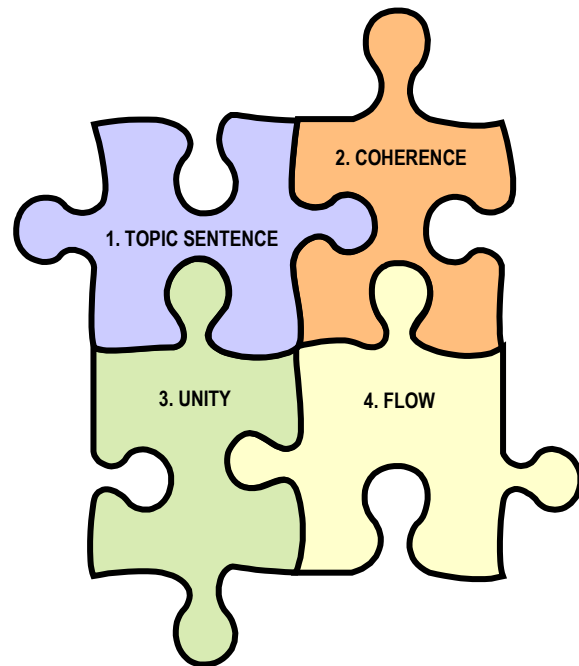
To give examples:

for example, for instance

To summarise:

therefore, thus, hence

How do you structure a paragraph?



- 1. Topic Sentence** - A statement of the main idea you will discuss in the paragraph.
- 2. Unity** - Each sentence builds on and links to the one main idea of the paragraph.
- 3. Coherence** - The main idea is developed using explanations, examples, etc. in a clear, logical and connected way.
- 4. Flow** - The way you order your ideas and your use of appropriate linking words and phrases contribute to the smooth flow and development of your ideas.

Academic paragraphs are different from the paragraphs you see in newspapers, magazines and emails. They are more in-depth and they rely to a greater extent on credible evidence to back up any claims that have been made.

Paragraph sample

Sport psychologists are also assisting coaches to manage talent. Doing so requires an understanding that talented people are very good at reflection (good thinkers).

← Topic sentence identifies point to be developed.

They also exploit their strengths through strong self-awareness, which is turned into their advantage. In addition, talented people often fail, but learn to convert setbacks into opportunities.

← Appropriate linking phrase used.

They have an urge for personal growth, meaning and purpose in all that they do, and a general feeling of being on the move (Robertson & Abbey, 2003).

← Supporting sentences develop and explain argument.

Understanding and borrowing information on good-to-great levels of leadership (Collins, 2001) and [on] what (really) works and does not work in managing people in business settings (Kehoe, Baartz, & Bate, 2004; Robbins, 2003) would assist sport psychologists and sport coaches in ...[managing talent].¹

← Expert sources paraphrased and referenced.

← Concluding sentence draws ideas together.

Editing your paragraphs

Write naturally to let your ideas flow and your argument build. Always leave time for editing and a final proofread.

Check you have:

- Ended all paragraphs with your own voice, not a quote.
- Varied your vocabulary (look for repetitive words like therefore or however).
- Included at least one or two references per body paragraph.
- Paraphrased rather than quoted when you can (this shows a greater understanding of the text).
- A proper paragraph structure before and after any large indented quotes.

TIP

Your paragraphs form the body of your essay, report or thesis. Look at other survival guides to help with your introduction, conclusion, thesis statement, developing an argument and essay structure.

¹Adapted for teaching purposes from Gordon S. 2007, 'Sport and business coaching: Perspectives of a sport psychologist' *Australian Psychologist*, 42, 271-282, p. 277.

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