



# PARAGRAPHS

## WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL PARAGRAPH?

No matter how good your ideas are, if they aren't well organized you won't successfully communicate those ideas to your readers. A writer can and should use well developed and organized paragraphs to guide the reader through the ideas of the paper.

The key to effective paragraphs is much the same as the key to effective pieces of writing. They each contain the same elements of structure and content, only on a different scale. Just as a written composition must express a coherent and cohesive argument/idea/thesis by using supporting evidence, analysis, and a conclusion, so must a paragraph. Similarly, just as the paragraphs of an entire piece of writing must logically flow from one to the next, so must each sentence of a paragraph.

### An effective paragraph should

1. Develop ONE main idea.
2. Begin with a **topic sentence** (also known as a **claim**), which introduces the focus of the paragraph (acting for the paragraph much as a thesis acts for an entire paper) and advances the overall thesis of the paper.
3. Provide evidence: relevant information that explains, illustrates, supports, and develops the idea introduced in the topic sentence.
4. Analyze/explain how/why the evidence is relevant.
5. Progress logically from one sentence to another.
6. Have a concluding sentence that states a final observation about the main idea of the paragraph and contributes to a smooth transition to the next paragraph.

### Paragraph length

There is no hard and fast rule about paragraph length. It depends on the length and sort of the piece of writing. However, there are some general considerations to help determine if a paragraph is too long or too short. If a paragraph consists of only a few sentences, it's likely that the idea in that paragraph isn't adequately developed. If a paragraph is excessively lengthy (a page or more), chances are it contains more than one main idea.

**For more on paragraph structure and development, follow these links:**

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/paragraphs/>

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/paragraphs\\_and\\_paragraphing/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html)

<https://www.umgc.edu/current-students/learning-resources/writing-center/writing-resources/parts-of-an-essay/paragraph-structure.cfm>

<https://www.hamilton.edu/documents/Paragraph%20Structure.pdf>