



Writing Skills: Paragraphs

Study Development Factsheet

You can improve the structure and flow of your writing by using paragraphs: small chunks of text dealing with one point or idea. Paragraphs help your reader follow what you are saying, and understand how your argument is developing.

How do I break my work up into paragraphs?

Above all, paragraphs should be consistent and clear. Each paragraph should explore a defined topic, and use evidence to inform an argument it has to make about that topic. While a paragraph should always be longer than a couple of sentences, it should rarely be longer than a full page.

A **critical paragraph** should take the following steps:

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| Step 1 | First, be clear about what your point is. What are you trying to say? Is it relevant to your title/question? Your point is the core of your paragraph: you can then build your paragraph around it.
Draft a sentence which summarises your point or the topic of your paragraph. This is called a 'topic sentence', which works as an introduction to your paragraph. |
| Step 2 | Support your point with evidence , examples and/or elaboration. |
| Step 3 | Once you have presented your evidence, you need to discuss it: paraphrase it, evaluate it, clarify exactly how it supports your argument. |
| Step 4 | Conclude : summarise your paragraph, restating the key idea and how strongly it is supported by research. |
| Step 5 | Signpost : indicate how this paragraph relates to paragraphs immediately before and after, and the text as a whole.
Start your paragraphs with linking words or phrases such as: Firstly, Secondly, In addition, Furthermore...
The last sentence can either be just the conclusion of your paragraph, or also signpost to your next paragraph. |
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An alternative model for critical paragraphing is to **remember to P.E.E.**

Point

- **Tell me! What's the main idea?** Begin with a topic sentence; give your paragraph a headline.

Evidence

- **Says who?** Quote, paraphrase, and discuss **relevant** sources.

Evaluation

- **So what? Explain** the significance of your evidence. Articulate **why** it matters and use it to support your **argument**.



Formatting

A new paragraph should be started on a new line, and can be indented, depending on your School's formatting guidance.

Structure

Each paragraph should have a clear structure, similar to the structure of an essay:

Introduction	- Topic sentence, clearly stating your point - Signposting: linking with previous paragraph
Argument	- Explain your point: elaborate, give more details/examples - Give supporting evidence, with references - Discuss the evidence: evaluate it and relate it to your point
Conclusion	- Summarise what you have said - When there is a strong link, signpost to the next paragraph

Here is an example of a paragraph answering the following question:

Why use paragraphs in academic writing?

One key reason for using paragraphs is that they aid understanding. Paragraphs enable the reader to follow the development of complex academic arguments. My research found that readers reported better comprehension of texts broken up into paragraphs, compared with texts written continuously. This finding is consistent with other recent research (Smith 2012, Wright 2013). On the basis of this evidence, students would be well advised to use effective paragraphing if they want examiners to understand their ideas.

Look at the paragraph above as an example. Is this a good paragraph?

Checklist	Does it deal with just one key idea? Does it have a clear link with the previous idea or question asked? Does it offer supporting evidence? Does it discuss the quality of the evidence? Does it have a clear conclusion?
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Use this checklist when proofreading your work. If there is more than one central idea in your paragraphs, consider breaking them up into separate paragraphs. This will make your writing much clearer.

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