

The Paragraph

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The purpose of this handout is to give some basic instruction and advice regarding the creation of understandable and coherent paragraphs.

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following: **Unity**, **Coherence**, **A Topic Sentence**, and **Adequate Development**. As you will see, all of these traits overlap. Using and adapting them to your individual purposes will help you construct effective paragraphs.

1. Unity:

The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If it begins with a one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas.

2. Coherence:

Coherence is the trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges.

logical bridges:

- The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence.
- Successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form

verbal bridges:

- Key words can be repeated in several sentences
 - Synonymous words can be repeated in several sentences
 - Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences
 - Transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences
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3. A topic sentence:

A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Although not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and despite the fact that topic sentences can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle), an easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph. (This is a good general rule for less experienced writers, although it is not the only way to do it).

4. Adequate development

The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Again, this varies from paragraph to paragraph, depending on the author's purpose, but writers should beware of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It's a pretty good bet that the paragraph is not fully developed if it is that short.

Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed:

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)