Paragraph Construction

What is a paragraph?
What is a paragraph?

After sentences, paragraphs are the next order of organization for written English communication.¹

A paragraph is a collection of sentences arranged in such an order that they convey a complete topic.²
What is a paragraph?

There is no “formula” to determine how many sentences comprise a paragraph. It depends on the depth and complexity of the logic employed.\(^3\)

The harmony and relationship of ideas among the sentences determine what constitutes a paragraph. Every sentence in the paragraph should relate to the main idea in some clear way.\(^4\)
There are four essential elements to good paragraph writing:

• Unity
• Order
• Coherence
• Completeness

5
Paragraph Unity

Every paragraph has one single, controlling idea.
That idea is expressed in the topic sentence.
A paragraph is unified around this main idea.
Topic Sentence

• The topic sentence **sums up** the whole of the paragraph and **ties** it all together.

• The topic sentence is **usually** the first sentence in the paragraph, but not always.

• The topic sentence points the reader toward **where you**, the writer, are **going** next.

• The topic sentence is the most "**general**" sentence in the paragraph.
Topic Sentence

• In order to write a good topic sentence, think about your theme and all the points you want to make.

• Decide which point drives the rest, and then write it as your topic sentence.
“Support” sentences add detail to the topic sentence.

Supporting sentences develop, explain, and substantiate the topic sentence.

Supporting sentences provide facts, details, and examples.

Supporting sentences explain why the main idea is true.

A paragraph may have as many supporting sentences as needed to corroborate the main idea.
Paragraph Order

A paragraph’s order refers to the way you organize your supporting sentences.
Paragraph Order

There are many ways to organize a paragraph. Here are just a few:

• **Chronological**: the order of events, or time order

• **Spatial**: looking at how things are arranged in a space (descriptive)

• **Emphatic**: details presented in their order of importance or for emphasis

• **Cause and Effect**: a certain situation causes--- or results from---another

• **Comparison/Contrast**: examining the similarities or differences between things

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ
Coherence is the quality that makes your writing understandable.

Sentences within a paragraph need to connect to each other and work together as a whole.

One of the best ways to achieve coherency is to use transition words.

These words create bridges from one sentence to the next.
You can use transition words that show:

- **order** (first, second, third)
- **spatial relationships** (above, below)
- **logic** (furthermore, in addition, in fact)

Other ways to maintain coherence in a paragraph:

- Use consistent **verb tense** (past, present, future)
- Maintain **point of view** (person)
Completeness means a paragraph is well-developed.

If all sentences clearly and sufficiently support the main idea, then your paragraph is complete.

If there are not enough sentences or enough information to develop your main point, then the paragraph is incomplete.
Paragraph Completeness

Usually **three** supporting sentences, in addition to a topic sentence and **concluding sentence**, are needed for a paragraph to be complete.

The concluding sentence or last sentence of the paragraph should **summarize** your main idea by **reinforcing** your topic sentence.

The concluding sentence either **finishes** the paragraph or **prepares** the reader for the next paragraph.¹⁵
Paragraph Transitions

A paragraph might begin with a reference to the preceding paragraph.

These are called paragraph transitions and are very important for clear writing. Transitional words help signal to the reader shifts in thought or sequence. They help present ideas in a clear and organized way.

Some transitional words help present the sequence of ideas; others are used to clarify the relationship between ideas.
Paragraph Editing

The editing stage is when you check your paragraph for mistakes and correct them.\textsuperscript{17}
Paragraph Editing

Grammar and Spelling

• Check your spelling.
• Check your grammar.
• Read your assignment again.
• Make sure each sentence has a subject.
• See if your subjects and verbs agree with one another.
• Check the verb tenses of each sentence.
• Make sure that each sentence makes sense.
Paragraph Editing

Style and Organization

• Make sure your paragraph has a topic sentence.
• Make sure your supporting sentences focus on the main idea.
• Make sure you have a concluding sentence.
• Check that all your sentences focus on the main idea.
• Check your use of transition words.
• See if your paragraph is interesting.¹⁹
Academic paragraphs (and multi-paragraph essays, which will be the topic of another lesson) are different from "ordinary writing" (such as letter writing) in that certain kinds of expressions are not allowed.

For example, in formal essays, you should not use contractions such as don't or aren't. Instead, you should write out the words in full, for example, do not and are not.
Also, in formal essays you should avoid the first and second person. That is, do not use the pronouns I or you. The pronouns we and us are sometimes used in formal essays in some major fields, but in general you should not use these unless you are certain that they are customary in your field and/or your professor allows them. It is safer simply to use the third person.²¹
Resources

• Liberty University’s Online Writing Center
  • http://www.liberty.edu/academics/graduate/writing/index.cfm?PID=17176

• Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab
  • http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

• The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation by Jane Straus
  • http://www.grammarbook.com
Endnotes

6. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 96.
13. Williams, Style: Toward Clarity and Grace, 92.
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 337-349.

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ