

THE PARAGRAPH

What is it?

A paragraph is a group of sentences that are all related and that all deal with a single subject. This subject is stated in a topic sentence. A paragraph has a beginning that introduces the reader to the subject at hand, a middle that develops the point by further explication and supporting details, and an end that emphasizes the significance of the insight you have arrived at or provides a transition to the next paragraph.

What is the purpose?

Imagine someone ranting at you without stopping to take a breath. You wouldn't be able to take in all they were saying and would lose the point. This is what happens in writing that doesn't use paragraphs. Without paragraphs, a piece of writing doesn't provide pauses for the reader to take in the points being made. Also, the points are not organized so the reader can easily get confused. This is why all writing uses paragraphs: to organize each point or topic as its own unit so the reader can take in everything that is said.

What is a good paragraph?

A good paragraph can be short or long but it must have focus, unity, development, and coherence.

The **focus** is the particular idea you want to present at that point in the composition. This idea is stated in a topic sentence. It is better for beginners to start out stating the focus clearly in a topic sentence at the start of the paragraph to make sure readers can follow the ideas presented. Expert writers can avoid stating the topic outright or can put the topic sentence anywhere in the paragraph because their language and organization can let you know what the focus is in sophisticated ways.

Unity refers to how everything in the paragraph should concern itself with the focus. Only have one idea per paragraph and don't stray off-topic! State the idea in a topic sentence; develop the idea through description and explanation; and, illustrate the idea with appropriate details, facts or examples.

Development means that the idea is discussed in enough depth and supported by enough illustration or evidence that it is clear and convincing to the reader. It also means that the ideas and information are presented in a logical order, such as: from specific to general, from general to specific, from least to most important, chronologically or spatially.

Coherence is what helps the writing flow from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph so that the reader can easily follow from point to point. Coherence is created by replacing key nouns with pronouns, repeating key terms, using a consistent tense

and point of view, employing parallelism when appropriate, and creating transitions between sentences.

TRANSITIONS

What is a transition?

A transition is a bridge from one idea to another. You need transition words to link sentences to sentences in each paragraph. You need transition sentences to link paragraph to paragraph in the overall composition. You can end a paragraph with a transition sentence that links its idea with the idea of the next sentence, or you can begin a paragraph with a transition sentence that links its idea with that of the paragraph the reader has just read. In very long compositions, you might need to write a short transition paragraph to bridge the complex ideas of the preceding and following long paragraphs.

How do I create a transition?

There are two kinds of transitions: logical and verbal. Usually writers use both. Logical transitions use the organization of ideas to create coherence. Verbal transitions use language to create coherence. The main goal is for each sentence to lead smoothly and logically to the next.

Logical Transitions:

- The same idea is continued from sentence to sentence.
- Parallel form can be used to construct a series of sentences.

Verbal Transitions:

- Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences.
- Synonyms can be used to repeat key words in several sentences.
- Transition words can be used.

Transition Words:

To add: and, also, additionally

To enumerate: first, second, third

To qualify: often, generally, usually

To change direction: but, however, although, whereas

To give reasons: since, because

To illustrate: for example, in other words, that is

To draw conclusions: therefore, hence, consequently

To summarize: in short, finally