

Upgrade Study Advice

Paragraphs: how to write

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Need to pay attention to writing coherent paragraphs

A 2-page paragraph?

Do not write one-sentence paragraphs

Comments such as these mean that your reader is finding your work hard going, and having problems with

- Seeing your main points
- Following your argument
- Seeing the structure of your work.

Comments about paragraphs are really comments about structure and content – which is why paragraphs matter.

Paragraphs have a structure

- A paragraph has a **main idea**
- This main idea is usually expressed clearly in one sentence, the first, or '**topic sentence**'
- Paragraphs have a **beginning, middle** and an **end**. The sentences in the middle explain, develop, illustrate or modify the main idea in the topic sentence. The last sentence often returns to the idea in the topic sentence to show how it has developed.

Paragraph structure has a purpose

It makes it easier to

- **Read**: the main idea is first, and you know that this idea will be developed before you move on
- **Plan**: each paragraph develops a single point. You can link related points and plan the overall structure
- **Write**: start with a clear statement of the point you are making, then add detail. Start a new paragraph when you start a new point.

How to write a paragraph

Try this paragraph plan

A paragraph plan

1 Start with the topic sentence

- to express the main idea

2 Explain or define any abstract, key or problematic terms

- to clarify the topic sentence

3 Show your evidence

- to support your main idea or argument in the topic sentence

4 Comment on the evidence

- to show how it supports or develops the main idea
- If appropriate, mention other evidence (examples/ studies/ experiments/ interpretations) to widen the discussion

5 Conclude

Look back to your topic sentence:

- how have you moved on / developed the main idea in it?
- where are you going next?

Then write the sentence.

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Look at some examples

Using the paragraph plan

Look at this example from a student's essay:

The career image of the hospitality industry is poor. Firstly, it is perceived as having low rates of pay, which contributes to the poor image of the industry. This means that the industry is at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining good staff. A report by the Hotel and Catering Training Company (2003) found that jobs in the industry are commonly rated by students as having lower status than jobs requiring similar skills and qualifications in other industries. The industry seems to be doing little to combat this perception. The survey also showed that careers information available to students and young people making decisions about their future was inadequate and of poor quality.

Paragraph checklist

Try checking the paragraph plan against

- one paragraph of something you are reading
- a paragraph you have written.

Can you see a structure?

- What is the main point? Where is the main point? (1)
- Do you /the author explain what you mean? (2)
- Do you / the author support your statement with studies/ sources or argument? (3)
- Do you / the author comment on your sources?
- Do you / the author end in a way that connects with the first sentence?

Is it too short? Or too long? For most purposes 5-8 sentences works well, but of course it varies according the type of writing.