

WRITING THE PARAGRAPH

THE BASIC RULE:

KEEP ONE IDEA TO ONE PARAGRAPH

The basic rule of thumb with paragraphing is to keep one idea to one paragraph. If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and several bits of supporting evidence within a single paragraph. You can have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph. If the single points start to get long, then perhaps elaborating on each of them and placing them in their own paragraphs is the route to go.

General Paragraph Guidelines:

Paragraphs like papers in general need to be:

United – focused on a single thing.

Coherent – easily understandable to a reader.

Adequately developed—

UNITY

Unity in a paragraph implies a sustained purpose and forbids digressions and irrelevant matters

UNITY

The development of a single controlling idea usually presented in the topic sentence. Each sentence should somehow develop that idea and no other. A paragraph on the role of midwives in child-birth should not digress to child-rearing in the same paragraph

COHERENCE

A QUALITY WHERE THE WRITER MAKES IT EXPLICITLY CLEAR WHAT THE CONNECTIONS ARE BETWEEN THOUGHTS. IN LATIN, COHERENCE BASICALLY MEANS "TO STICK TOGETHER." MAKE THINGS STICK TOGETHER FOR YOUR READERS. YOU WON'T BE THERE BESIDE THEM SAYING "OH, THIS IS WHAT I MEANT." TELL THEM WHAT YOU MEAN IN WRITING! DON'T THINK "BUT, THAT'S

COHERENCE

Coherence is the trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader.

A paragraph is coherent if its details fit together clearly in a way that readers can easily follow. Sentences must also relate to one another structurally. Coherence can be achieved by repeating key terms, organizing ideas, using parallel structure, pronouns, and transitions.

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.

ADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT

If you say you will discuss several unusual items found in drugstores, then discuss several.

Give the readers enough meat to chew on about the topic. What is adequate? Well, it's quite subjective but remember this little saying (sexist implications aside) from one of my early English teachers: "An essay or paragraph is like a woman's skirt: it should be long enough to cover the topic and short enough to be interesting."

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)

TRANSITIONS

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE

TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS EMPHASIZE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IDEAS, SO THEY HELP READERS FOLLOW YOUR TRAIN OF THOUGHT OR SEE CONNECTIONS THAT THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE MISS OR MISUNDERSTAND. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH FROM STEPHEN JAY GOULD, “WERE DINOSAURS DUMB?” SHOWS HOW CAREFULLY CHOSEN TRANSITIONS (CAPITALIZED) LEAD THE READER SMOOTHLY FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCLUSION

I don't wish to deny that the flattened, minuscule head of the large-bodied "stegosaurus" houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective, BUT I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. FIRST OF ALL, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, FOR EXAMPLE) is remarkably regular. AS we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, BUT not so fast as body size. IN OTHER WORDS, bodies grow faster than brains, AND large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. IN FACT, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. SINCE we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. IF we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs in particular.

TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

The last sentence of some paragraphs act as a bridge to the next paragraph. Consider this example, from a paper in which a writer compares Americans' reactions to traveling to other parts of the country:

Many Westerners don't like rivers in the East. They are alarmed by the muddy water, the overhanging trees, and the snakes. Some Easterners aren't too thrilled about Western rivers, either.

Western rivers can seem shallow, freezing cold, too exposed to the sun, rocky, and uninviting to someone used to the gentle and fertile rivers of the East. Instead of a gentle float in a canoe, a Western "river run" can be a terrifying experience for the novice Easterner. .

Note how the writer begins the transition at the end of the first paragraph and then continues the transition with a strong topic sentence in the next paragraph.

TRANSITIONS WORDS THAT INDICATE SUPPORT TO THE STATED IDEA

- Moreover
- Additionally
- Besides
- Furthermore
- In fact

TRANSITIONS WORDS THAT INDICATE OPPOSITION TO THE STATED IDEA

- Although
- However
- In spite of
- Rather than
- Nevertheless
- On the other hand
- but

TRANSITIONS WORDS THAT INDICATE A RESULT OF THE STATED IDEA

- Therefore
- However
- When
- So
- Consequently
- Accordingly
- Because

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The final sentence of a paper in the final paragraph is known as The concluding sentence, it should restate the main idea (found in your topic sentence) and reinforces the point or opinion. It should leave the reader with a concise final thought.

If you are lost about how to
write good solid paragraphs
use the method taught at
MVHS.

1. Topic Sentence
2. Concrete detail
3. Commentary
4. Concrete detail
5. Commentary
6. Concluding or transitional sentence.

TOPIC SENTENCE

A TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is about. An easy way to make sure the reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put topic sentences 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). Regardless of whether an explicit topic sentence is included or not, the reader should be able to easily summarize the paragraph.

A TOPIC SENTENCE

A paragraph is unified when every sentence develops the point made in the topic sentence. It has single focus and contains no irrelevant facts. Every sentence contributes to the paragraph by explaining, exemplifying, or expanding the topic sentence. In order to determine whether a paragraph is well developed or not, ask this question: "What main point am I trying to convey here?" (topic sentence) and then "Does every sentence clearly relate to this idea?"

LENGTH OF PARAGRAPHS

LENGTH OF PARAGRAPHS

No rules are carved in stone tablets dictating how long a paragraph should be. However, a good rule of thumb is that, if your paragraph is shorter than five or six good, substantial sentences, then the writer should reexamine it to make sure that all ideas are fully developed. A paragraph should be long enough to do justice to the main idea of the paragraph.

LENGTH OF PARAGRAPHS

If paragraphs runs on to a page or longer, reexamine its coherence to make sure that it sticks to only one main topic. Perhaps the writer can find subtopics that merit their own paragraphs. Think more about the unity, coherence, and development of a paragraph than the basic length.

Paragraphs that are too short, probably lacks sufficient development. paragraph that are too long, often ramble on to topics other than the one stated in the topic sentence.