

PARAGRAPHS

WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is a distinct section of your writing that deals with a single topic or point. It is indicated by a new line and an indentation. They usually start with a main idea and then give evidence to support that main idea. Paragraphs offer coherence and organization to your paper. Different paragraphs will act as transitions and sign posts to your readers. Remember that each sentence in a paragraph should somehow relate back to your topic sentence, and that each paragraph should relate to your thesis.

FORMAT

Topic Sentence

- States the Main Idea of the whole paragraph
- Usually comes first or after a brief transition

Note: If evidence is presented first, a paragraph can lead up to a conclusion sentence.

Support

- These sentences offer support and expound upon the topic sentence
- Explanations and definitions of terminology
- Facts
- Examples
- Reasoning
- Quotes from experts

Note: Your support sentences should clearly relate back to your topic sentence and your overall topic of the paper.

A Wrap-Up Sentence

- A final sentence that wraps up the paragraph
- It will usually relate back to the topic sentence
- Does not serve as a transition into the next paragraph

WHEN TO CHANGE PARAGRAPHS

Paragraph breaks can offer the reader a pause, function as a transition, and give your paper organization.

You should start a new paragraph when:

- You change subjects or ideas
- You change the time or place of your paper
- You want to provide an example or illustration of your idea

A NOTE ABOUT LENGTH OF PARAGRAPHS

In elementary school you probably heard that a paragraph should be about 5 sentences long. This is good for elementary school but not so much for college writing. A paragraph's length should be determined by the idea you are discussing in your paper. In a paper it is good to vary your paragraph length. Varying the length of your paragraphs can give your paper diversity and rhythm. Too many short paragraphs and your thoughts might come across as choppy or fragmented. Too many long paragraphs and your readers might get lost or lose interest.

If you are confused on where to break a paragraph or if a paragraph is too short, refer to the "When to Change Paragraphs" or the "Format" sections of this handout.