

# Paragraph Structure

A paragraph is “a distinct section of a piece of writing, usually dealing with a single theme and indicated by a new line, indentation, or numbering” (Oxford English Dictionary). Although many writers understand that academic writing needs to be broken into distinct paragraphs, some do not realize that individual paragraphs have their own internal organization. This handout will give you advice for how to craft clear, strong paragraphs.

## The Parts of a Paragraph

Each paragraph of academic prose should have a distinct introduction, body, and conclusion. There is no rule about how many sentences must be in a paragraph; a paragraph can consist of a single sentence, or over a dozen sentences.

### Paragraph Introduction: Topic Sentence

The first sentence of your paragraph should be a topic sentence that clearly identifies the main idea, point, or topic that you will develop in the rest of the paragraph.

### Body of the Paragraph

After your topic sentence, you should have as many sentences as necessary to develop the idea of the paragraph. Here’s how to develop the body of your paragraph:

- Explain the idea.
- Use an example.
- Explain why the example relates to the idea.

### Concluding a Paragraph

After you have introduced and developed your paragraph, you will need to conclude it and transition to the next idea. Your conclusion/transition can be a single sentence or several sentences depending on the style of your writing and how long your paragraph is.

- Draw a conclusion.
- Transition to the next paragraph’s idea.

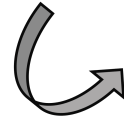
## Ways to Organize a Paragraph

There are different ways to order the sentences of a paragraph. Here are a few options:



### Chronologically

- Arrange the paragraph so that it moves forward in time.
- Arrange the paragraph so that it moves backward in time.



### In Order of Importance

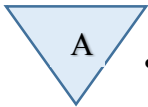


- Arrange the paragraph in order from most important to least important information

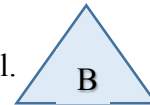


- Arrange the paragraph in order from least important to most important information

### General vs. Specific



- Start with general information, and then become more specific
- Start with specific information, and then become more general.



## Sample Paragraph

Clear, engaging paragraphs are very important for successfully communicating with your audience. Well-organized paragraphs that carefully connect each sentence to the larger idea make it easier for a reader to understand the author's message and purpose. For example, the paragraph you are reading right now should be easy to understand because it is carefully organized. Each sentence is clearly linked to the sentences before and after it, and you can probably feel how smooth and logical this paragraph is. As you can see, this paragraph began with a topic sentence, explained the topic sentence, gave a supporting example, and then explained the example. Now that you can see the organization of this paragraph, you should be ready to write your own; if you need more help, be sure to check out our other resources.