

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a sentence or group of sentences that develop one idea or one point. Thus, a paragraph is built around that central idea in much the same way that your essay is built around your thesis or the controlling idea for your paper.

Paragraphs generally follow one of two patterns of development: from general to specific or from specific to general. In a paragraph that develops from general to specific, a topic sentence is placed at the beginning of the paragraph. In a paragraph that develops from specific to general, it is placed at the end. A topic sentence is a mini-thesis that acts as the controlling idea for that paragraph. Regardless of how you might use a topic sentence, every sentence in your paragraph should in some way contribute to the reader's understanding of the idea in your topic sentence.

A *unified* paragraph is one that does not stray from the development of your topic sentence. A *well-developed* paragraph is one that contains generalized ideas and explanations as well as specific details to back up these generalities. A *coherent* paragraph is one in which ideas and sentences flow logically and smoothly.

Functions of Paragraphs

- To describe a person, place, or thing.
- To explain how something works.
- To cite evidence — facts, statistics, details, precedents — that confirms or corroborates your topic sentence or thesis.
- To quote, summarize, or paraphrase the testimony of others to support your topic sentence.
- To present examples, illustrations, or anecdotes relevant to the topic sentence.
- To define a term or terms.
- To offer a comparison or contrast to the ideas being presented — pointing out similarities or differences.
- To refute a point of view.
- To explore the causes/effects of the idea being presented.
- To transition from one part of the essay to another — to show the relationship between parts of an essay.