



# Paragraphing

A paragraph is a section of sentences that are unified by a fully developed idea. Paragraphing includes the arrangement and length of paragraphs within a paper and while this organization may seem fairly straightforward, it can prove to be a difficult task to create. However, deciding where to end a paragraph and where to begin a new one can be made easier by following these essentials!

## Essentials of Paragraphing

### ▪ One Main Idea

- A paragraph should always focus on *one fully developed idea* that supports your thesis or argument. Keeping only one idea to one paragraph is important to ensure your paper remains clear and concise. If you find yourself transitioning into a new idea in a single paragraph (which happens frequently during a writing process) it's time to create a new paragraph.
- The easiest way to present one idea in a single paragraph is to introduce it in your topic sentence. You can present your one idea and then use evidence to support it. (Note: You can write several statements or points in a paragraph, but they must relate to the overall idea.)
  - However, you do not have to limit your idea to a single paragraph. Often, ideas that support your thesis or arguments require more than one paragraph. Even so, it is important to keep a single idea or point of an argument to one paragraph.

### ▪ A Clear Topic Sentence

- A topic sentence is a clear way to indicate that you are beginning a new idea and lets the reader know the *overall topic of the paragraph*.
  - The best place to put a topic sentence is as the first sentence of your body paragraph. The reason for this placement is because your audience can then read the rest of your paragraph with the overall topic in mind.
  - For more on topic sentences, click [here](#) (or hold down Command and click [here](#) if you're on a Mac).

### ▪ Strong Sentence and Paragraph Flow

- Sentences are what make up your paragraphs! To ensure your paragraphs are clear and concise, *your sentences need to have connections*. This point means that one sentence needs to connect to the next, whether it be by the same idea, the use of pronouns to refer to previous nouns, or even by key or synonymous words.
  - You should also focus on these connections between your paragraphs. These connections are often linked using “transition words,” but those can

become overused. Briefly mentioning a previous idea in a new paragraph can be highly effective to avoid this repetition.

- For more on transitions, look at our resource [here](#) (remember to hold down Command if you're on a Mac).
- **A Summarizing, Concluding Sentence (or two)**
  - When an idea is done being explained within an essay, it essential to write a concluding sentence or sentences. Just imagine that you were having a conversation with someone about a certain issue and then they abruptly stop talking about that issue to start discussing another. This example emulates what ending a paragraph without a concluding sentence can be like.
    - The concluding sentence, then, is simply a sentence (or two) that acts almost as the conclusion paragraph but in one to two sentences. Ask yourself, how would I sum up this paragraph? And then write it!
- **A Reasonable Length**
  - Typically, an academic essay's paragraphs are about half a page (generally, six to eight sentences across most disciplines). The length of your paragraphs should be dependent on the length of your paper. If it is a shorter paper (for example: a response to a reading, a flash fiction piece, or a reflection), you can have shorter paragraphs! If it is longer (for example: a term paper, a close reading, or an essay exam) you can have longer paragraphs! If you find your paragraph becoming a little long, reassess to see if you are becoming repetitive or if you are writing about more than one idea or about more than one facet of the same idea.
    - Sentence wise, a paragraphs number of sentences can vary. If you're not sure if your paragraph is too long, then stick to six to eight sentences per paragraph.
- **An Articulate Arrangement**
  - Paragraphs should also be organized logically, so your paper has a clear flow. This flow varies by paper and by writer, so the easiest way to understand your arrangement is by reading through a draft and seeing if a paragraph interrupts the overall flow. If one does, find another place where it would make more sense. Here, you are approaching your paper as a reader and not a writer.

### Resources for more information:

- The OWL at Purdue has this resource on crafting paragraphs:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/paragraphs\\_and\\_paragraphing/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html)
- We also have the MEAL (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link) plan worksheet on our IWU website under the “resources” section:  
<https://www.iwu.edu/writing-center/student-resources/mealplan.pdf>