



The Learning Centre

Essay Writing

Paragraphs

Each **paragraph** within an essay should:

- Have a **topic sentence**.

A **topic sentence** is a sentence that indicates, in a general way, what idea or part of the thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. An easy way to make sure your reader can identify the topic of the paragraph is to put the topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph.

- Fully and adequately discuss one topic, as introduced by the topic sentence.

Here are some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed:

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (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)

- Develop the topic with supporting evidence.
- Be between 1/2 and 3/4 of a page (double spaced).
- Use **transitional phrases** to maintain structure and logic.

Transitional phrases show that the student is linking ideas together and critically analyzing the material. Some examples of transitional phrases include:

- “for example”
- “however”
- “furthermore”
- “as a result of”
- “on the other hand”

- Maintain coherence by creating **logical bridges** and **verbal bridges**.

logical bridges: When one idea within a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence and when successive sentences are constructed in parallel form.

verbal bridges: When key words are repeated in several sentences, synonymous words are repeated in several sentences, and transition words are used to link ideas from different sentences.

- Maintain consistency by using one verb tense (past, present, or future).
- Contain a transition sentence that moves the reader from one paragraph to the next.

Starting a New Paragraph

Some students are confused about when to start a new paragraph. You should start a new paragraph when:

1. You begin a **new idea or point**. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
2. You want to **contrast information or ideas**. Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
3. Your **reader needs a pause**. Breaks between paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding in breaks will help make your writing more readable. Creating a break may be necessary if the paragraph becomes too long or if the material is complex.
4. You are **ending your introduction or starting your conclusion**. Your introductory and concluding material should always have its own paragraph. At the same time, many introductions and conclusions require multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose. In this case, simply make sure that any introductory or concluding material is not brought up in the same paragraph as your body material.

Paragraph Structure

It is always worthwhile to try out different structures within your paragraphs. Nonetheless, if your paragraphs tend to lack unity and coherence, you may want to use the following structure:

