

Writing paragraphs

Academic writing consists of a series of paragraphs which together make up the essay or report. It is therefore important to know how to construct a good paragraph.

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of connected sentences. Each paragraph is made up of **one main idea** with a **group of supporting sentences**.

- Each paragraph should start on a new line, with a space between paragraphs.
- It may be long or short
- It contains a single topic or idea. If you start a new topic, start a new paragraph.
- It starts with a topic sentence which tells the reader what this paragraph will be about and how the paragraph will help to answer the question.
- It continues with supporting sentences which develop or give details about the topic sentence. These sentences can:
 - Define keywords or phrases
 - Explain and clarify ideas
 - Give examples and evidence/support from reliable sources
 - Expand on the main idea by giving additional details
- It concludes with a sentence which summarises the paragraph and/or provides a link to the next paragraph.

Helpful hint - TEE acronym

T = Topic sentence

E = Explain ideas

E = Examples

- Paragraphs should be clear, logical and easy to understand, with each sentence linked to the one before and the one after. Use transitions and linking words to maintain flow.

Types of paragraph

An essay will contain three types of paragraph:

1. An introductory paragraph (5-10% of word count) which will introduce the topic, define key terms, and outline the purpose of the essay or state the main argument.
2. Several body paragraphs (80-90% of word count) which will discuss each of the ideas or topics which make up the argument of the essay.

3. A concluding paragraph (5-10% of word count) which should restate the main argument or purpose of the essay (in different words), summarise the main findings or points of the essay, and suggest how these ideas link to the argument or purpose. Do NOT introduce new material or evidence in your conclusion.

Adapted from:

Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. Paragraphs. Retrieved from http://library.cpit.ac.nz/learning_services/learning_and_study_resources/assessment_tasks/paragraphs, 9 May 2013.

Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. How to write better paragraphs. Retrieved from <http://www.openpolytechnic.ac.nz/study-with-us/study-resources-for-students/writing-and-formatting/how-to-write-better/how-to-write-better-paragraphs/>, 8 May 2013.

Further reading

Page, M. & Winstanley, C. (2009). *Writing essays for dummies*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley.

Saddler, B. (2012). *Teacher's guide to effective sentence writing*. New York: Guilford Press.

Thoreau, M. (2006). Organising paragraphs. In *Write on track : a guide to academic writing*. Auckland, N. Z.: Pearson Education, p. 191-200.