

Paragraph Structure

A paragraph is a unit of thought, not of length. It is series of sentences about a single topic or idea. All the sentences in a paragraph must relate to this idea.

There are no set rules about paragraph length. A paragraph is seldom only one sentence, because you cannot develop an idea in one sentence.

Paragraph Structure

Topic Sentence

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a paragraph. Its purpose is to introduce the reader to the main idea of the paragraph. Sometimes the topic sentence will start with a [transitional](#) word or phrase (e.g., However; In addition) to show the relationship of the idea to the idea in the previous paragraph.

Sentences that develop the idea presented in the topic sentence

The sentences that follow the topic sentence then explain, develop, discuss, and illustrate the main idea. These supporting sentences must follow a logical order to develop the idea. The information must be sourced from [credible](#) literature and be correctly [cited](#).

Wrap up/linking sentence

The final sentence wraps up the main idea and/or provides a link to the following paragraph.

Clearly show the beginning of a paragraph by indenting five spaces or by double-double spacing between paragraphs. The visual division between paragraphs helps the reader to understand the structure of the writing and therefore to process the ideas more easily.

Example (taken from Clark, 1997, p. 14)

Topic Sentence

Now, if observation provides the foundation for knowledge then theories give shape to its content.

Theories are the conceptual tools we use to represent our thought about the external world, and are expressed in linguistic and mathematical symbols.

However, because language is far less precise and economical in its representation, there was a push by the positivists to reduce

knowledge to mathematical or alphabetic formulae which possess a higher degree of precision, elegance and universalizability. Hence, a formula such as $E = mc^2$ is to be preferred over its linguistic equivalent.

Sentences that develop the idea presented in the topic sentence

Wrap up/linking sentence

Reference: Clark, J. (1997). *Educational research: Philosophy, politics, ethics*. ERDC Press Massey University.

Try the paragraph structure quizzes: [Paragraphs – 1](#) and [Paragraphs - 2](#)