**Paragraphs**

What are body paragraphs?

Body paragraphs address the main points of your argument. They divide the central idea of your paper into smaller sections and subtopics. Although each body paragraph addresses a separate element of your main argument, paragraphs should flow together logically to create a unified essay.

A strong paragraph should…

- Relate back to your thesis statement.
- Be focused on only one aspect of your overall argument.
- Begin with a **topic sentence**.
- Use **supporting details** and examples that relate to your argument.
- **Transition** smoothly into the next paragraph.
**Topic Sentences**

Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence, which conveys the paragraph’s main idea. Topic sentences should not only address the scope of a particular paragraph, but they should also relate back to your thesis statement.

**Topic Sentence Hint:**

Try thinking of topic sentences as “miniature” thesis statements. Like a thesis, your topic sentence is not a blatant statement of fact. Instead, it should indicate an analysis of your topic. For example, if you are analyzing literature, avoid simply stating a plot point as a topic sentence; describe how that point relates to your argument.

**Questions to ask when developing topic sentences:**

- How can I signal to readers what this paragraph is about?
- How can I relate this topic sentence back to my thesis statement?
- How can I link this topic sentence to the paragraph before it?

**Q: Would this topic sentence be effective?**

*In the novel The Fountainhead, the character Howard Roark is expelled from architecture school.*

**A:** No. This statement would not be an effective topic sentence. It merely restates part of the story’s plot. It does not accomplish any analysis. This sentence could be revised by explaining why this part of the plot is important. For example:

*In The Fountainhead, Howard Roark’s expulsion from architecture school exemplifies his integrity and unwillingness to compromise his work.*

**Supporting Details**

A strong paragraph should be supported by relevant details, including any specific examples or quotations that strengthen your argument. Be sure all supporting details relate back to both your topic sentence and your thesis statement.
Transitions

Most paragraphs will conclude with a sentence that transitions into the next paragraph. A smooth transition is accomplished by relating the information in one paragraph to the topic sentence of the next paragraph.

How long do body paragraphs need to be?

A paragraph for an academic paper is usually at least 3-5 sentences long. Paragraphs may certainly be longer, but they should not contain too much varying information.

How can I tell when I need a paragraph break?

If you find yourself writing paragraphs that are longer than half of a double-spaced page, you may want to ask yourself how you can divide up the information into more manageable, well-focused sections.

Remember your reader.

Ask yourself if your reader would be overwhelmed by the amount of information is in a paragraph. Do you switch between topics too frequently within the paragraph? Your readers will better understand your argument if they can follow it step by step, through well-organized paragraphs.

Plan ahead!

The best way to produce coherent paragraphs is to plan them out before you write them. Try outlining your paper ahead of time to determine how many paragraphs you will end up with. You may also want to write all of your topics sentences ahead of time, keeping in mind how they relate to your thesis.
Paragraph revision

After you’ve written your body paragraphs, make sure they meet the following criteria:

☑ Each paragraph has a topic sentence.
☑ All topic sentences relate to your thesis statement.
☑ All topic sentences relate to the ideas in the rest of the paragraph.
☑ All topic sentences analyze your topic and are not just statements of fact.
☑ The paragraph is well-supported with details and concrete examples.
☑ The paragraph is focused around just one aspect of the paper’s argument and does not overwhelm the reader with too much information.
☑ Each paragraph transitions smoothly into the next one.