

Paragraphs are comprised of sentences, but not just random sentences. A paragraph is a group of sentences organized around a central topic. A well written paragraph focuses on one idea to take the readers on a clear path, without any detours.

The basic structure of a paragraph usually consists of 4-6 sentences: the topic sentence, 2-4 supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

There are 4 fundamental components of a paragraph which, when used correctly, can turn an adequate paragraph into a great one; they are unity, order, coherence and completeness.

- Unity in a paragraph begins with the topic sentence. Every paragraph has one single, controlling idea that is expressed in its topic sentence and this is usually the first sentence. A paragraph should be unified around this main idea with the supporting sentences providing detail and discussion.
- Order refers to the way the supporting sentences are organised. The order of these sentences may be chronological, by importance or another logical presentation of detail. Good sentence order allows the reader to understand your meaning and avoids causing any confusion.
- Coherence, or consistency, is the quality that makes your writing understandable. Sentences within a paragraph need to connect to each other and work together as a whole. Coherence can be achieved by using transition words that create bridges from one sentence to the next. Transition words such as 'first, second, third' show order while words such as 'above, below' show spatial relationships and words such as 'furthermore, in addition, in fact' show logic. Using a consistent verb tense and point of view are also required for coherency.
- Completeness means a paragraph has been fully developed. A paragraph is complete if all the sentences clearly and sufficiently support the main idea. If there are not enough sentences or enough information to prove your thesis, then the paragraph is incomplete. In addition to a topic sentence and concluding sentence, 2-4 supporting sentences are normally needed for a paragraph to be complete. The concluding sentence or last sentence of the paragraph should summarise your main idea by reinforcing your topic sentence.