



Writing a paragraph

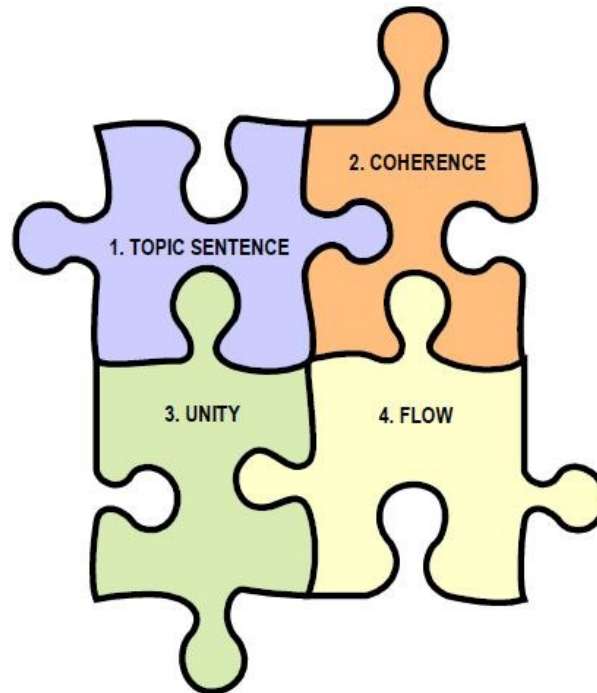
A paragraph is a unit of thought formed through a series of sentences. Paragraphs develop an idea (part of your argument) and provide evidence and examples to support your thesis statement. Each paragraph represents **one clear idea**.

Why paragraphs are important

Paragraphs form the **body** of your essay, report or thesis. A well-written paragraph develops a singular argument that builds to your central argument. Each paragraph should reveal new information.

Academic paragraphs are different from the paragraphs you see in newspapers, magazines and emails. They are more in-depth and they rely, to a greater extent, on credible evidence to back up any claims that have been made.

How do you structure a paragraph?



A good paragraph has 4 important features.

1. **Topic sentence:** A statement of the main idea you will discuss in the paragraph.
2. **Coherence:** The main idea is developed using explanations and examples, in a clear, logical and connected way.
3. **Unity:** Each sentence builds on and links to the one main idea of the paragraph.
4. **Flow:** The way you order your ideas and use appropriate linking words or phrases contribute to the smooth flow and development of your ideas.

In academic texts, most paragraphs will have at least 4 or 5 sentences.

- The first sentence is usually a topic sentence conveying the main idea of the paragraph – this should be one of the ideas listed in the outline of your introduction (refer to our academic skills resource on writing an introduction for further information).
- The following few sentences expand on the idea in more detail, with references to supporting literature.
- The second-last sentence connects the paragraph with your thesis statement and shows why the idea is important to your overall argument.
- The final sentence links to the next paragraph i.e. your next idea, for flow – if the previous sentence already creates flow, this sentence can be omitted.

Example of a good paragraph

Below is an example of a complete body paragraph. The essay question and thesis statement are provided for context.

Essay question:

Injuries sustained during extreme sports should not be treated at publicly-funded hospitals. Write an essay considering this proposition.

Argument / thesis statement:

This essay will consider the social limits of publicly-funded medical care in Australia as it is applied to voluntary recreational activities with elevated risks of injury, and will argue that the public health system has a duty to treat all injuries regardless of personal culpability.

Paragraph:

While extreme sports carry higher risks of injury compared to traditional recreational activities, their overall contribution to the burden on the healthcare system remains proportionally small. A 2023 study by Sports Medicine Australia found that extreme sports such as rock climbing, skateboarding, and motocross account for less than 4% of emergency room visits annually; by contrast, less publicised activities like cycling, recreational soccer, and even gardening reported higher injury rates per participant (SMA, 2023), yet these sports remain broadly accepted as part of a healthy lifestyle. This raises an important question: why are injuries from cycling or soccer accepted as inevitable, while injuries from extreme sports are often framed as avoidable recklessness? The distinction appears rooted more in cultural perceptions than in statistical reality, with extreme sports unfairly stigmatised as unnecessary or frivolous pursuits. Critics of publicly funded treatment for extreme sports injuries frequently argue that these injuries result from voluntary and inherently dangerous choices (Park et al., 2016; Li, 2020; Marchese, 2024). Yet this perspective oversimplifies the complex motivations behind extreme sports, which include fitness, mental resilience, and community engagement. Moreover, research by Jones and Carter (2022) reveals that most injuries resulting from extreme sports are not life-threatening, often requiring only minor surgeries or short-term physiotherapy rather than extended hospitalisation. Importantly, practitioners of these sports are disproportionately younger and healthier, meaning their long-term contributions to Medicare outweigh the temporary costs of their care. To dismiss these individuals as reckless ignores not only the broader benefits of their activities but also the societal precedent that has long defended public healthcare's duty to treat all patients equally, regardless of personal culpability. Therefore, while statistics suggest that the financial burden of treating extreme sports injuries is manageable, the deeper issue lies in challenging the biases that underlie this debate.

← Topic sentence

Developing sentences with supporting evidence and references

Examples of linking words / phrases

← Sentence connecting back to argument / thesis statement

← Sentence linking to next paragraph

Figure 1: Example of a paragraph.

Image long description: example of a paragraph with different coloured text for each component. Grey text labelled as "Topic sentence" states "While extreme sports carry higher risks of injury compared to traditional recreational activities, their overall contribution to the burden on the healthcare system remains proportionally small." Dark blue text labelled "Developing sentences with supporting evidence and references" states "A 2023 study by Sports Medicine Australia found that extreme sports such as rock climbing, skateboarding, and motocross account for less than 4% of emergency room visits annually; by contrast, less publicised activities like cycling, recreational soccer, and even gardening reported higher injury rates per participant (SMA, 2023), yet these sports remain broadly accepted as part of a healthy lifestyle. This raises an important question: why are injuries from cycling or soccer accepted as inevitable, while injuries from extreme sports are often framed as avoidable recklessness? The distinction appears rooted more in cultural perceptions than in statistical reality, with extreme sports unfairly stigmatised as unnecessary or frivolous pursuits. Critics of publicly funded treatment for extreme sports injuries frequently argue that these injuries result from voluntary and inherently dangerous choices (Park et al., 2016; Li, 2020; Marchese, 2024). Yet this perspective oversimplifies the complex motivations behind extreme sports, which include fitness, mental resilience, and community engagement. Moreover, research by Jones and Carter (2022) reveals that most injuries resulting from extreme sports are not life-threatening, often requiring only minor surgeries or short-term physiotherapy rather than extended hospitalisation. Importantly, practitioners of these sports are disproportionately younger and healthier, meaning their long-term contributions to Medicare outweigh the temporary costs of their

care." Orange text labelled "Sentence connecting back to argument / thesis statement" states: "To dismiss these individuals as reckless ignores not only the broader benefits of their activities but also the societal precedent that has long defended public healthcare's duty to treat all patients equally, regardless of personal culpability." Grey text labelled "Sentence linking to next paragraph" states: "Therefore, while statistics suggest that the financial burden of treating extreme sports injuries is manageable, the deeper issue lies in challenging the biases that underlie this debate." Several words in light blue throughout are labelled as "Examples of linking words / phrases", including "by contrast", "Moreover", "Importantly" and "Therefore".

Tips

- The minimum length of a paragraph is approximately 5 lines; the maximum length would be half of an A4 page.
- Linking words/phrases help to create flow in your writing. Readers look for these to signal where your writing is heading, so make sure you include them.

Useful linking words and phrases:

- To add: *also, in addition, furthermore.*
- To compare: *similarly, in the same way.*
- To contrast: *however, on the other hand.*
- To give examples: *for example, for instance.*
- To summarise: *therefore, thus, hence.*

How do you write good sentences?

A good sentence should start off with something familiar or simple for the reader to connect with, then lead into something new/unfamiliar that you want them to know. Structuring a sentence this way makes it easy for the reader to follow and understand your point.

Topic sentences

Topic sentences normally start with a clause addressing the main theme of your essay and end with a clause that supports your position.

Example:

While extreme sports carry higher risks of injury compared to traditional recreational activities *[clause addressing main theme]*, their overall contribution to the burden on the healthcare system remains proportionally small *[clause supporting your position]*.

Developing sentences

Developing sentences often start with background information and end with specific details linking back to the topic sentence.

Example:

A 2023 study by Sports Medicine Australia found that extreme sports such as rock climbing, skateboarding, and motocross *[background including a citation and*

familiar extreme sport names] account for less than 4% of emergency room visits annually *[new information, in this case a statistic, linking back to the topic sentence]*.

Example:

Importantly, practitioners of these sports are disproportionately younger and healthier *[background]*, meaning their long-term contributions to Medicare outweigh the temporary costs of their care *[point linking back to topic sentence]*.

Tips

- Make sure every sentence relates to the main idea of your paragraph. Remember, you are leading your reader, so if you go off track they will too.
- Some sentences will need to address counter arguments. Whenever you raise points that oppose your position, be sure to refute them immediately in the following sentence.

Additional guidance

- Write naturally to let your ideas flow and your argument build.
- Always leave time for editing and a final proofread. Look for spelling (Australian English), grammar and typing errors.
- Check that you have:
 - ended all paragraphs with your own voice, not a quote
 - varied your vocabulary (look for repetitive words like “therefore” or “however”)
 - included at least one or two references per body paragraph
 - paraphrased rather than quoted, when you can – this shows a greater understanding of the text.