

Paragraphs: Academic Writing

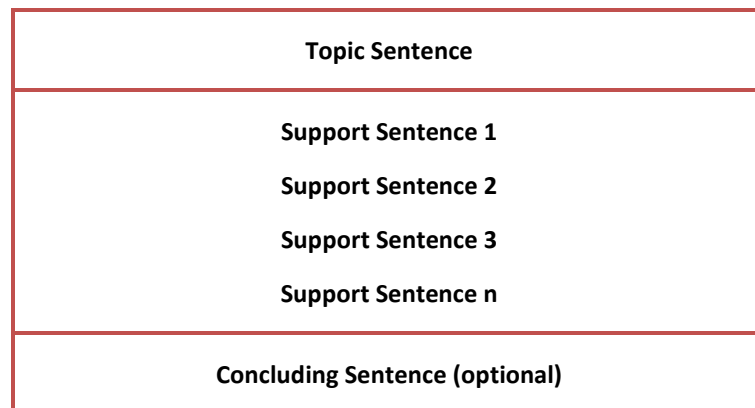
Academic paragraphs are the **body paragraphs** of your essay and account for about **80–90% of your word count and marks**. They may also be the structure of **short-answer questions** in other types of writing. Academic paragraphs contain the points you want to make with supporting arguments and evidence. These paragraphs use a basic pattern (recipe) you can follow. The sentences in your body paragraphs may include citations from information sources, examples, and anecdotal evidence. Each support sentence must contribute to the argument you are developing in the paragraph and the rest of the essay. You will need to know about:

1. Paragraph structure
2. Checklist for writing a paragraph

NOTE: Citation style
APA 7th Edition. Modify
for other citation styles.

1. Paragraph structure

A paragraph is generally 200–300 words in length and consists of a topic sentence, a number of support sentences, and an optional concluding sentence.



The topic sentence

In most cases, the first sentence of a paragraph is the topic sentence. The topic sentence states briefly what the paragraph will be about in broad enough terms that an in-text citation is not needed. It is not just a list of the points in the paragraph. From a good topic sentence, you should be able to predict the content of the paragraph.

The support sentences

The topic sentence is followed by the support sentences. Support sentences expand on the topic sentence. The material in the support sentences should be presented in a systematic way. Order of importance, chronological order, order of operations or space order are most frequently used. All statements containing information need to be supported with in-text references.

The concluding sentence

The concluding sentence summarises the main points made in the paragraph. It often re-states the idea in the topic sentence using different words. Not all paragraphs have a concluding sentence.

EXAMPLE OF AN ACADEMIC PARAGRAPH

Assessment via essays has a number of advantages. Coursework essays can ameliorate the extreme stress experienced by some students with end-of-semester examinations, especially when the exam component is the majority of the grade. It has, however, been argued that the result of this can be to spread stress out over the duration of a unit rather than remove it entirely (Baumgart & Johnson, as cited in Hounsell, 1984).

Essays also provide an avenue for students to show how much they understand, and how well they can communicate what they have learned. They are therefore a useful means for lecturers to assess students' learning and to provide students with appropriate feedback, which Ramsden (1992) observes is "a primary task of all teaching" (p. 185). Finally, unlike some other assessment tools, such as group projects, essays can usually reliably be attributed to individual student effort (Hounsell, 1984). Accordingly, despite recent concerns about plagiarism, essays are a relatively equitable means of ascribing marks and grades to students.

Note the use of paraphrases and quotes with appropriate in-text references (both narrative and parenthetical) to support the writer's argument.

Business & Linguists students must use page or paragraph numbers for paraphrases

2. Checklist for writing a paragraph

Step 1 – Write the topic sentence

The best starting point for a paragraph is a topic sentence. If you are writing the paragraph in response to a specific question, this should not be a difficult task because the wording of the question will assist you.

Step 2 – Brainstorm

Once you have written the topic sentence, you need to research for ideas to support it. Try brainstorming. Jot down anything that relates to your topic sentence: facts, details, or examples. This might only take a few minutes, but it is an important part of the writing process.

Step 3 – Plan

Brainstorming will probably provide you with more ideas than you require. Read over what you have written, and cross out those ideas that do not obviously relate to the topic sentence. Arrange the remaining ideas in the order you wish to present them in your paragraph.

Step 4 – Write the first draft

The first draft should include all the ideas in your plan. It is a good idea to use every second line if you are writing the first draft on paper. This makes revision and editing much easier. Once you have finished writing the first draft, think about what you have written. You might consider a concluding sentence. Write one if you think it is necessary to complete the paragraph.

Step 5 – Revise and edit

Revising and editing your paragraph means rethinking and rewriting. It may involve making additions or corrections, rewriting sentences, or rearranging details. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the topic sentence clear and relevant?
2. Do the facts, details, and examples explain/develop the topic sentence?
3. Is there enough support?
4. Is the material presented in a systematic way?
5. Does one sentence lead smoothly to the next?

Step 6 – Check grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Step 7 – Write the final draft

Step 8 – Proofread your paragraph