



What is a Paragraph?



A paragraph is a group of sentences that focuses on one specific topic.

You might say that a paragraph is like a small family and all of the sentences are members of that family.

Or you can think of a paragraph as an island. An island is complete all by itself. It doesn't need outside help or support to make it complete. However, it can also function as part of a group. For example, the islands of Hawaii are grouped together to form one state. They can stand alone, but they can also come together to form something larger. Paragraphs can stand alone or they can be joined together to form larger works of writing.



Parts of a Paragraph

Types of sentences that make up a paragraph

Topic sentence- This is the sentence that tells the main topic of the paragraph. It's usually the first sentence in a paragraph, but not always. It's a leader because it decides the subject of the paragraph and all of the other sentences have to group around it and support it.

Supporting sentences- These sentences provide support and details to the topic sentence. The topic sentence makes a statement or assertion and the supporting sentences prove it. They provide the details and examples to back up what is said in the topic sentence.

Clincher sentence- This is the last sentence in a paragraph and it is the finisher. It takes everything that has been said in the topic sentence and supporting sentences and ties it all together and ends the paragraph, usually by restating the topic sentence in a new way.

***Writing tip: Although it's proper to teach that every paragraph should have a concluding sentence, you'll find that this is not always the case. In academic writing, such as essays and reports, a concluding sentence is usually used at the end of a paragraph. However, you'll find that in the real world of published writing, this is not usually the case.*



Types of Paragraphs

Expository, Narrative, Descriptive, Comparing and Contrasting

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- **Expository Paragraph:** These paragraphs offer information such as a definition, explanation, evaluation, or an opinion.

Rocks make great pets! They are quiet and still so as not to annoy anyone. They don't make a mess because they don't even move. No matter what you do to them, whether you paint them or throw them in the lake, rocks don't grumble or get mad. Rocks are great listeners too! You don't even have to feed or potty train them. Everyone should have at least one rock for a pet.

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- **Narrative Paragraph:** This paragraph is like an extremely short story or part of a story. It shows a sequence of events or narrates something that happens.

The day I learned to ride my bike is a day I'll always remember. My dad took the training wheels off and ran along beside me holding on to the seat while I pedaled. I rode back and forth across the yard with him running beside me. Suddenly, I noticed I was riding alone; Dad was no longer beside me. I was riding my bike all by myself! To this day, I can still feel the pride I felt at that moment.

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- **Descriptive Paragraph:** This type of paragraph paints a picture with words. It might describe a setting, a person, an object or a number of other things. It brings something to life so the reader can see, hear, feel, smell or taste it.

It was a dark and stormy night. You could barely see your hand in front of you except when thunder boomed and lightning lit up the sky like fireworks. A howling wind wrestled leaves from the trees as the air developed a distinct chill. As the rain pounded the old abandoned house, every rattle and creak of the floorboards conjured up images of ghosts and monsters. It was the kind of night I can never forget, but don't want to remember.

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- **Comparing and Contrasting Paragraph:** This paragraph shows the similarities and differences between two or more things.

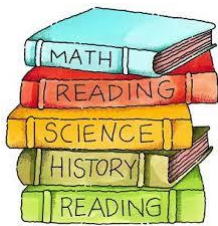
Fingers and toes are necessary body parts, but they have different functions. Both fingers and toes are called appendages and they appear at the end of extremities. Fingers are on your hands and they pick up things, hold tools such as forks and pens, and are used to create and work. Toes, on the other hand, are not on the hand at all. They are on your feet and their primary purpose is to keep you balanced when standing upright and walking. Fingers and toes have unique jobs, but both are needed in order for the body to fully function as it was designed to function.

Other types of paragraphs exist, but these are some of the main types.

The Purpose of Paragraphs

Why do we need paragraphs in writing?

The primary purpose of a paragraph is to make it easy for the reader to understand what is being conveyed by the writer. Paragraphs provide a sense of order by grouping sentences together around a topic. Paragraphs that are well written and flow in a logical sequence bring unity and readability to longer pieces of writing. They also provide a visual break for the reader, which makes the writing seem less intimidating and more appealing. Basically, paragraphs break writing into smaller components which makes the larger piece seem more palatable to the reader.



When Do We Start a New Paragraph?

How to know where one paragraph ends and another begins

We should start a new paragraph when:

- **Changing to a new SUBJECT or point** - For example, you might write about your three favorite types of candy and devote one paragraph to lollipops, one to chocolate bars, and one to chewy, bite-sized candy.
- **The SETTING has changed** - This would be primarily used in a story, but you would change paragraphs if you were writing about your character's apartment in London and then about his office in Paris.
- **The TIME has changed** - Again, this is primarily used in stories, but you would start a new paragraph if you wrote about your character's childhood and then switched to her current life as a young adult.
- **A new SPEAKER begins** – The rules for writing paragraphs change a bit when it comes to dialogue. Each time a new person speaks, you start another paragraph which means that some paragraphs will only be one line.

Example: *"Did you see the alien that came off of that spaceship?" asked Maria.*

"How could I miss him?" answered Kyle. "He was neon orange!"

"I didn't notice his color," said Maria. "I was busy admiring his designer cowboy boots!"



Common Paragraph Problems



How to mess up a paragraph

- **Failure to indent** - This is especially important if you're writing by hand. When typing, it's acceptable to space between paragraphs instead of indenting. It's important to offer some way for the reader to understand that one paragraph is ending and another is beginning.
- **No topic sentence** - If you don't add a topic sentence it's like sending your reader on a road trip with no destination in mind. How will he know when he gets there or what you're trying to get across with your paragraph?
- **Too many topics** - You can't shove all that you want to say into a single paragraph. Use only one topic per paragraph, please.
- **No train of thought** - Have you ever tried to carry on a conversation with someone who gets distracted easily? The person starts talking about one topic, but then switches to another and another until the original thought is lost or forgotten. It can be annoying to talk with someone like that, but you can just as easily lose or annoy your reader if you don't stick to the main topic of your paragraph. Leave out anything that isn't necessary to convey your point.

How to Write a Stellar Paragraph



Writing paragraphs others want to read

- **Stick to one simple point.** Choose one topic, but develop it extremely well with strong supporting sentences.
- **Add sentence variety.** Vary the length of sentences. Use some short sentences as well as longer ones. Don't start every sentence the same way. Use different types of sentences. Make some statements, ask some questions, add emphasis when needed. Mix it up to add interest.
- **Make it your goal to create a train of thought.** The first sentence should make the reader want to read the second sentence. The second sentence should lead the reader into the third sentence and so on down the line. The writing has a logical flow and is so interesting that the reader wants to keep reading all the way to the end.

