

Academic writing: paragraph level

1. Paragraph

- It helps to think of your assignment in terms of paragraphs in the planning and drafting stages.
- A paragraph consists of one main point, and is made up of a number of sentences – a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.
- Think of a paragraph as a brick. A well organised piece of writing is like laying a brick neatly on top of one another; a disorganised one is like a heap of bricks thrown on the ground.
- You need to be very conscious of how your paragraphs work together to communicate your information and understanding to your audience.
- The length of a paragraph largely depends on the purpose of the paragraph, and what you have set out to talk about in your topic sentence.
- A paragraph that is too long makes it difficult for your audience to follow.
- A paragraph that is too short may reflect your inadequacy in developing the main idea.
- Avoid a one-sentence paragraph. A paragraph needs a topic sentence, followed by sentences of elaboration and explanation (i.e. supporting sentences).

2. Topic sentence

- A topic sentence sums up the paragraph – it tells your audience what the paragraph is about.
- It performs the same function as the introduction, which provides a preview of your assignment.
- It is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph – the first or second sentence.
- The first sentence should connect the paragraph to the previous paragraph.

Logical flow between paragraphs

- The first and last sentences of a paragraph act as links or transitions to connect one paragraph to another.
- Often, the last sentence (i.e. concluding sentence) of a paragraph links it to the next paragraph.
- These links ensure that there is a smooth flow throughout the writing.

3. Logical flow within a paragraph

- Logical flow should also occur within a paragraph.
- Each sentence should follow on to the next – the move from one sentence to the next should be logical.
- Information included within a paragraph should be presented in a logical, sequential manner.

4. Logically flowing sentences

- When one sentence is linked to the following sentence by including common information, this creates a logical flow within a paragraph, and a clear, logical and sequential text.
- This is achieved when new information in a sentence is presented as a given information in the following sentence.

Adapted from the following sources:

Morley-Warner, T. 2000, *Academic writing is... A guide to writing in a university context*, Centre for Research and Education in the Arts, Sydney.

UniLearning 2000, accessed 10 June 2000, < <http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/main.html>>

