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# Writing an Essay 2: Paragraph Structure

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## Objectives

- To understand how a paragraph is **structured**
- To show **cohesiveness** in a paragraph, and **coherence** in a piece of academic writing
- To be aware of the **different types of paragraphs** in a piece of academic writing

## Discussion Questions

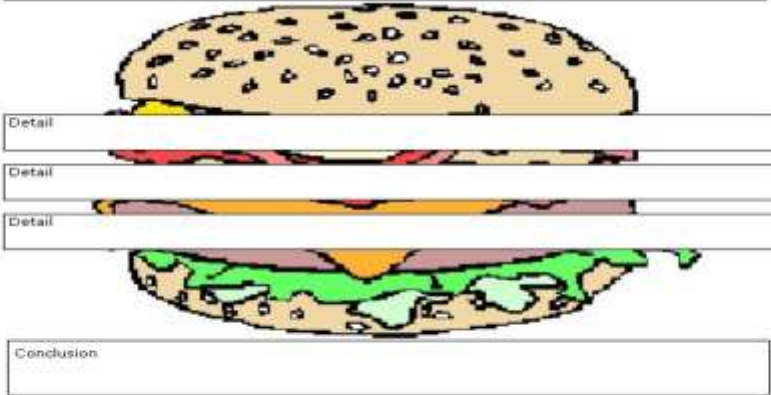
- How long should a good paragraph be? Is there a minimum or maximum length/number of sentences?
- Is a one-sentence paragraph OK? Yes/no? Why?
- How many main ideas should one paragraph have?
- What is a “topic sentence”?
- What is a “thesis statement”?
- Do I need to have references in every paragraph?

## Paragraphs

- A paragraph is a **related** group of sentences which develops **one** main idea.
- The **topic sentence** expresses the main idea and usually occurs as the first sentence in each paragraph. All sentences in the paragraph directly support the topic sentence.
- **Supporting sentences** follow the topic sentence in a logical order.
- A paragraph may also contain a **concluding sentence**, or sentences which provide a **transition** to the following paragraph.

## Graphic Organizer - Hamburger Model

Topic Sentence



## Choose appropriate paragraph length

- Too long - break it up!
  
- Too short – combine!

A series of long paragraphs can make prose dense and unpleasant to read. If it is too long – break it at a logical place and create a new topic sentence.

Also look for paragraphs only two or three sentences long. They make academic writing seem disjointed or skimpy.

Try combining a few short paragraphs into one, using a single topic sentence to hold them together.

## Activities

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/paragraphs>

- How a paragraph can be structured
- Examples of good topic sentences
- Use of linking words

## Building a body paragraph: supporting ideas

The paragraph develops and demonstrates the topic sentence by:

- Explaining, giving definitions or distinctions
- Offering details, facts, examples or relevant quotations
- Evaluating ideas
- Following a logical sequence- showing the connection between ideas (eg cause and effect, comparison and contrast)



## Supporting Ideas: examples

### – Compare and contrast

*In comparison, the upper middle socio-economic group are most likely to be competitive regarding their child's achievements.*

### – Evaluation

*Considering the above factors then it is obvious that levels of CO<sub>2</sub> must be lowered.*

### – Provide more detail

*The digital age includes the internet, mobile phones and most importantly, computers.*

## Example Body Paragraph

Australia is a society where economic inequality is pervasive and deeply entrenched. Familiar generalisations about Australia's unique 'egalitarianism' do not match with the factual picture. The social dynamics at work, and the levels of inequality resulting, are much the same as are found in North America, Western Europe, and middle ranking capitalist economies elsewhere. For example studies of income and wealth distribution show that the top 20% of Australians hold 72% of the wealth (Dilnot, 1990) and the top 10% of households receive 40% of total income (Raskall,1993). Therefore contrary to the 'Australian egalitarianism' perceived by the world, closer investigation proves otherwise.

main point

amplifying and explaining

giving evidence

concluding or linking to next paragraph

## Writing an Introduction

- Introductions used in all academic writing
- Good introduction gets reader's attention
- Poorly written introduction → indicates disorganised and confused writing for the rest of the essay

An introduction is used in an essay, a report, an article, a thesis, a journal, a literature review, or any other piece of academic writing.

If an introduction is poorly written, you will lose your readers' goodwill and confuse them right from the beginning, and can be sure of losing marks.

If the introduction is poorly written, then it usually follows that the rest of the essay /report etc. will be disorganised and confused. Getting the introduction right makes it far easier to write the rest of the assignment.

## Introduction

Any introduction must contain the following:

- Brief, relevant background information and/or other contextualising material
- A thesis statement
- Scope points
- Your point of view (depending on the type of essay)
- Any definitions that are needed to explain or limit the scope of the essay question.

## Example Essay Question

*In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.*

Monash University, 2012, *Language and Learning Online*, Sydney,  
viewed 14 November 2016, <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/index.xml>

## Example Introduction

A major change that has occurred in the Western family is an increased incidence in divorce. Whereas in the past, divorce was a relatively rare occurrence, in recent times it has become quite commonplace. This change is borne out clearly in census figures. For example thirty years ago in Australia, only one marriage in ten ended in divorce; nowadays the figure is more than one in three (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996: p.45). A consequence of this change has been a substantial increase in the number of single parent families and the attendant problems that this brings (Kilmartin, 1997).

An important issue for sociologists, and indeed for all of society, is **why these changes in marital patterns have occurred**. This essay will seek to critically examine a number of sociological explanations for the 'divorce phenomenon' and also consider the social policy implications that each explanation carries with it. **It will be argued that the best explanations are to be found within a broad socio-economic framework.**

Introduces the topic  
The scope of this essay is Western families' increased divorce rate.

Background information contextualises the topic. The divorce phenomenon is defined.

Outline of the structure of the essay

The thesis statement explicitly states the specific focus of the essay.

## Conclusions

The conclusion should:

- summarise all your arguments from the body, refer back to the scope points from the introduction and the central topic; and evaluate it. This gives your essay a sense of unity.
- usually be a paragraph in length, but an extended essay (3000+ words) may have two or three paragraphs.
- make your final statement about the topic.
- note any implications resulting from your discussion of the topic, as well as recommendations, forecasting future trends, and the need for further research.

## Conclusions

The conclusion should **not**:

- just sum up
- end with a long quotation
- focus merely on a minor point in your argument
- introduce new material
- Just rewrite the scope points from the introduction



## Example Conclusion

A comprehensive explanation for the growing trend of marital breakdown presents a complex task; and it is even more complex to find solutions that might ameliorate the problems created by it. Clearly though, as has been argued in this essay, the most useful answers are to be found not within a narrow legal framework, but within a broader socio-economic one.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that, whilst current social contexts may appear to indicate increased family instability, research suggests that historically, instability may have been the norm rather than the exception. As Bell and Zajdow (1997) point out, in the past, single parent and step families were more common than is assumed - although the disruptive influence then was not divorce, but the premature death of one or both parents. This situation suggests that in studying the modern family, one needs to employ a historical perspective, including the possibility of looking to the past in searching for ways of dealing with problems in the present.

Make reference to the question

Sum up the arguments of the essay and confirm the thesis statement

May suggest recommendations or indicate significance or implications that follow

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