

WRITING WELL-SUPPORTED, ORGANIZED, UNIFIED, AND COHERENT PARAGRAPHS*

In academic writing, all paragraphs should—

BEGIN OR END WITH A CLEARLY-STATED TOPIC SENTENCE that contains a *controlling idea* about a *specific topic*.

BE ADEQUATELY-SUPPORTED using a *variety* of supporting evidence in order to substantially develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence. Select from among the following methods to make sure your paragraph is adequately-developed:

- Personal examples (brief and extended) and illustrations
- Data (facts, statistics, evidence)
- Testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Anecdotes or story (personal or observed)
- Definition of unfamiliar terms or concepts
- Comparisons and/or contrasts
- Discussion of causes and reasons
- Examination of effects and consequences
- Analysis
- Chronology or historical background

BE FILLED WITH INTERESTING AND SPECIFIC DETAILS

Which sentence is more interesting?

“I had a nice dinner at a local restaurant the other night.”

OR

“I had lobster crepes, accompanied by steamed Brussels sprouts smothered in hollandaise sauce, warm multi-grain rolls with agave-sweetened butter, and a lovely strawberry coconut cheesecake drizzled with white chocolate for dessert over at 150 Grand Café in Escondido on Tuesday evening.”)

* Some information in this handout was adapted from the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>

BE UNIFIED! The entire paragraph should concern itself with a *single focus*. If your paragraph begins with a one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another. Don't go off topic! *One paragraph/one idea!*

BE COHERENT: Coherence is the trait that makes the paragraph *easily understandable to a reader*. All the supporting sentences in your paragraph should follow a logical sequence. There should be a smooth, forward progression of ideas—no choppy or detached ideas or thoughts. You can help create this coherence in your paragraphs by creating “verbal bridges,” as follows—

- Key words can be repeated in several sentences
- Synonymous words can be repeated in several sentences
- Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences
- Transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences

NOT SURE WHEN TO START A NEW PARAGRAPH?

- **When you begin a new idea or point.** New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
- **To contrast information or ideas.** Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
- **When your readers need a pause.** Breaks in paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in will help your writing more readable. You would create a break if the paragraph becomes too long or the material is complex.
- **When you are ending your introduction or starting your conclusion.** Your introductory and concluding material should always be in a new paragraph. Many introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose.