

IGCSE English Language

Technical Skills: Paragraphs

Why use paragraphs?

A paragraph is a group of sentences that are connected by a single main idea (or topic).

I think that paragraphs are not very useful. They get in the way of my creative flow when I am writing. Writing is quite fun. I read books so I know I can write. Books can be more interesting than movies. [bad example]

I enjoy being creative when I am writing. Though I do not like paragraphs to constrain my written work, I understand the importance of connecting my sentences to a main idea. Well-structured paragraphs help to keep the reader with me as I unravel my story; crafted properly, effective paragraphing can seamlessly transition from one idea to the next idea in the paragraph to follow. Good paragraphs help the writer express topics in structured, easy-to-grasp sections. [better example]

What is a paragraph?

- A paragraph is a group of sentences that are connected by a single main idea (or topic).
- A good paragraph is:
 - Unified** (all sentences related to the main idea);
 - Related** (to the central thesis of the written work);
 - Coherent** (logical structure, following a plan for development);
 - Well-developed** (topic and supporting sentences are explained with examples or details).
- A paragraph is sometimes one sentence long, but it is usually between two and six sentences in length.

What goes into a paragraph?

If you want your writing to be easily understood, and you pride yourself on setting high standards, make sure to include the following in every paragraph:

Topic sentence or main idea – usually as the start of the paragraph. The main idea can also be implied, rather than stated in the topic sentence.

Related sentences (details) – explain the topic sentence/main idea; support the main idea with example(s); explain the example(s).

Conclusion – complete the main idea of the paragraph. It is usually the last sentence in the paragraph (it can mean the same as the first sentence, although it will be worded differently).

Transition sentence – especially useful with long pieces of written work, the transition sentence helps to move or change the paragraph's main idea towards the next development in the next paragraph.

Paragraph: Topic and Related Sentences

A **topic sentence** should identify the main idea of the paragraph. It is usually the first sentence in a paragraph, to help the reader understand what the paragraph is about and what will be discussed.

We are having a delicious pasta dish for dinner.

A topic sentence will be explained or developed by the supporting sentences. These are the **related sentences**, giving details or examples of the main idea.

We are having a delicious pasta dish for dinner. It has fresh spinach linguini, complemented by caramelised onions, strips of red and green peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, diced olives, and grated Cheddar cheese. A red wine sauce, seasoned with herbs, lightly coats the pasta to add to the flavours.

Paragraph: Conclusion and transition sentences

A paragraph works best if it has a **conclusion** to complete the main idea. It can be worded differently from the first sentence, and is usually the last sentence in the paragraph.

We are having a delicious pasta dish for dinner. It has fresh spinach linguini, complemented by caramelised onions, strips of red and green peppers, sundried tomatoes, diced olives, and grated Cheddar cheese. A red wine sauce, seasoned with herbs, lightly coats the pasta to add to the flavours. **This pasta dish is so tasty that it is hard to have just one bowl.**

A **transition sentence** is particularly helpful with long paragraphs, to move the main idea in one paragraph to the development of the next idea in the following paragraph.

Paragraph: Internal Organisation

Different types of paragraphs are used for the following types of writing:

Classification paragraphs – classify or separate various parts of the subject matter within the paragraph.

Definition paragraphs – explain the meanings of the subject, with suitable examples to make the definitions clear.

Description paragraphs – provide specific details that appeal to the senses, and focus on action in a clear, chronological order.

Exposition paragraphs – comprehensively describe and explain an idea or theory.

Paragraph: Internal Organisation

Different types of paragraphs are used for the following types of writing:

Narration paragraphs – tell a story, with each paragraph as one part of the story that then leads to the next paragraph.

Process (how-to) paragraphs – explain step-by-step how something works or how something is done, by following a sequence.

Persuasion paragraphs – aim to persuade the reader into taking a particular point of view, by using persuasive language, critical and logical thinking.

When to start a new paragraph

Start a new paragraph when:

You begin a new idea or point. Remember to keep one idea to one paragraph.

You want to contrast or compare ideas or information. Your contrasting ideas will be more powerful if introduced in separate paragraphs.

You want to give your readers time to pause. Long paragraphs that have complex or dense information will be better understood if separated into more than two paragraphs.

You want to end your introduction or start a conclusion. An introduction or conclusion should always be in a new paragraph so that supporting details highlight the introductory or concluding sentence.

Common Mistakes

No topic sentence – this makes it difficult to connect the sentences in the paragraph to any central idea or topic.

More than one topic sentence – this can cause confusion or make your main idea compete with another in the same paragraph.

Transition sentences are absent – whilst not always necessary, transition sentences can help the flow of one idea to the next.

Paragraphs too long – if a paragraph is too long, you run the risk of losing the reader's interest, or making mistakes.

Paragraphs too short – although paragraphs can be one sentence long, they are usually at least two sentences to give a main idea and supporting details.

Where to go from here ...

The best way to improve your own written paragraphs is to read, read, read.

Remember that paragraphs are to help the reader digest the material more easily. This is done through topic sentences and supporting details, as well as transitioning to the next developing idea, or coming to a conclusion. When well written, paragraphs make reading the story, information leaflet, or textbook, effortless.

So, pick up something to read!

Paragraph Resources

INTERNET SUGGESTIONS:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/1/>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/paragraphs/>

www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/paragraph-writing-secrets/

Paragraph Resources

- Worksheets created by Eddis Tutorial Services, LLC.
- Reading good books to improve paragraph structure (see book lists for IGCSE English Literature, for example)