

How to Write Paragraphs in the Body Your Essay

You've written your thesis statement, have a solid idea of what you want to write about in your paper, and you might even have an outline. Now you need to write start writing the paragraphs themselves. Let's look at how we can use what you already know to help you craft stronger paragraphs.

Recapping the Five-Paragraph Essay Format

By far, the most commonly taught formula for writing is the five-paragraph essay because it's both relatively easy and flexible. It has three parts:

- An **introduction** that gives the reader some background information and outlines what the paper will be about.
- A **body** that provides the important information, evidence, and arguments for the paper.
- A **conclusion** that sums up what was written in the essay and tells the reader why the essay was important.

A good paragraph follows a very similar structure. Like the essay as a whole, it will generally have these three parts:

- A **topic sentence** that introduces the main topic of the paragraph and tells the reader what you'll be writing about.
- A middle section (sometimes called **exposition** or **evidence and analysis**) that provides the information, evidence, and arguments for that paragraph.
- A **transition sentence** (sometimes called a **lead-out**) that tells the reader why the information in the paragraph is important and ties it back to the thesis statement.

Topic Sentences

Before you start providing evidence, you'll want to tell the reader a little bit about the topic at hand. The **topic sentence** is the first sentence in a body paragraph, and it's probably one of the easiest in the essay to write. Just write a sentence about what the paragraph is going to be about.

- A good tip is to start with the phrase, "This paragraph will be about _____." Then, fill in the blank and delete the words "This paragraph will be about."
- Remember that each paragraph should have a single overarching topic that can be summed up in a sentence. If you can't think of a single sentence, you might need to break the idea into two or more paragraphs.

The Middle Part

The middle part of the paragraph is often the hardest. But, the good news is that this is structured like a mini-paragraph or essay with an introductory element, a middle part, and a conclusion.

- Once you've selected the evidence you'll use, you'll introduce it using short phrase indicating what the information is or why it is important. With quotes or data, this normally takes the form of something like, "According to so-and-so," or "So-and-so says." We sometimes call these **lead-ins** or **signal phrases**.
- Then, provide the evidence by including the data, quote, or anecdote.
- Finally, **paraphrase** the evidence by putting it in your own words. Then **analyze** it by explaining why it's important. Like with the topic sentence, you can start with a partial sentence that you'll delete later. You can try writing, "This information is important because _____" and then delete everything before the blank.
- You'll complete these three steps for *each* piece of evidence in your paragraph.

Transition Sentences

Transition sentences are often neglected, but they're really important for making your paragraph feel finished.

- In the transition sentence, you'll be recapping what you said in the paragraph and explaining why it's important.
- You can start by paraphrasing the topic sentence, then connect it back to the thesis and show how the information in the paragraph proves your thesis statement. The easiest way to do this is to try something like, "[Topic of paragraph] proves [claim from your thesis] because _____."

5 Steps for Writing a Paragraph

Here are five quick steps to writing a paragraph:

1. Start by creating a short **topic sentence** to tell the reader what the paragraph will be about.
2. Select your **evidence** and write a short **lead-in** or **signal phrase** to tell the reader where you got the information before the evidence.
3. Write a sentence or two that paraphrases what the evidence says and explains why it's important.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 as needed until you've used all your evidence for that paragraph.
5. Finally, finish the paragraph on a strong note by writing a **transition sentence** that tells the reader how the information in the paragraph explains or proves your claim in your thesis statement.