

Fact sheet - Level 1

Paragraphs

Setting your work out in paragraphs is a very important part of making your writing clear to the reader. Paragraphs are like stepping stones - they lead the reader from one end of your writing to the other. But when do you start a new paragraph? Well some people like using **TiPToP**, so let's see how this works.



- Ti** - stands for **Time**, so start a new paragraph for a different time period.
- P** - stands for **Place**, so start a new paragraph for each new place.
- To** - stands for **Topic**, so start a new paragraph for each new topic, idea or subject.
- P** - stands for **Person**, so start a new paragraph for each new speaker.

Go to [BBC Skillswise](#) or [BBC bitesize](#) for more information on paragraphs.

Fact sheet - Level 1

The Topic of a Paragraph

The topic of a paragraph is generally introduced by a key sentence. This is often called a topic sentence. As its name suggests, this sentence contains the central idea of the paragraph. It may make a statement that the rest of the sentence develops. It often - but not always - comes at the beginning of the paragraph.

Topic sentence - the first sentence of a paragraph that tells the reader what the paragraph is about.

Supporting sentences - these sentences add details to the topic sentence.

Ending sentence - this concludes or closes the paragraph.

Example: The topic is **college**.

The **topic** sentence could be: College is very important.

Three **supporting sentences** relate to the topic sentence:

- You learn how to study.
- Teachers teach you how to organise your work.
- You learn how to use computers.

The supporting sentences can be moved around so that the paragraph is in order or makes more sense. To strengthen your writing, make sure that each of your supporting sentences relates well to the topic sentence. It is not enough to be generally in the same topic area.

Linking Paragraphs

Linking paragraphs

Paragraphs can be linked by numbers

- In the first place.....
- In the second place.....
- In the third place.....

Firstly-----secondly-----thirdly

- The first group
- The second group
- The third group

You cannot use numbers unless you have two or three points to make.

Paragraphs can be linked by phrases:

In spite of this..., although this is true..., on the contrary..., on the other hand..., another way.., not only .., but also.., to sum up.., you might think that..

Paragraph lengths:

There is no standard length for a paragraph. A paragraph should not be so long that you lose track of the thought being expressed. If in doubt, divide a long paragraph into two shorter ones. It is confusing if a piece of writing consists mainly of very short paragraphs. The exception to this is speech. In a story that contains dialogue, it is normal to use a new paragraph each time a new person speaks.

Fact sheet - Level 3

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Learning to write good paragraphs will help you as a writer stay on track during your drafting and revision stages. Good paragraphing also greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing. You can have fantastic ideas, but if those ideas aren't presented in an organized fashion, you will lose your readers (and fail to achieve your goals in writing).

The Basic Rule: Keep One Idea to One Paragraph

The basic rule of thumb with paragraphing is to **keep one idea to one paragraph**. If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and several bits of supporting evidence within a single paragraph. You can also have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph. If the single points start to get long, then perhaps elaborating on each of them and placing them in their own paragraphs is the route to go.

Elements of a Paragraph

To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following: **Unity, Coherence, A Topic Sentence, and Adequate Development**. As you will see, all of these traits overlap. Using and adapting them to your individual purposes will help you construct effective paragraphs.

Unity

The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If it begins with a one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas.

Coherence

Coherence is the trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges.

Logical bridges

- The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence
- Successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form

Verbal bridges

- 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

A topic sentence

A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Although not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and despite the fact that topic sentences can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle), an easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph. (This is a good general rule for less experienced writers, although it is not the only way to do it). Regardless of whether you include an explicit topic sentence or not, you should be able to easily summarize what the paragraph is about.

Adequate development

The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Again, this varies from paragraph to paragraph, depending on the author's purpose, but writers should beware of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It's a pretty good bet that the paragraph is not fully developed if it is that short.

Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed:

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)

How do I know when to start a new paragraph?

You should start a new paragraph when:

- **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.

Transitions and Signposts

Two very important elements of paragraphing are signposts and transitions. Signposts are internal aids to assist readers; they usually consist of several sentences or a paragraph outlining what the article has covered and where the article will be going.

Transitions are usually one or several sentences that "transition" from one idea to the next. Transitions can be used at the end of most paragraphs to help the paragraphs flow one into the next.

Fact sheet - Level 1

Closing Paragraphs

Ending sentence to close/finish/end the paragraph.

Ending sentences can:

- a) repeat the topic sentence in a different way
 - b) express how we feel about the topic
 - c) express what we think about the topic.
-
- It is important to go to college (repeating topic sentence)
 - I love going to college (expresses feelings)
 - I think college is important for people of all ages (expresses thoughts).

Reminder:

Make sure the facts you are writing are related to the **exact** question you are going to answer in your paragraph.

- What facts and ideas can I use to support my introductory sentence
- Where can I find more facts on this topic?
- Why is this topic important?
- How can I make this paragraph more interesting?

Fact sheet - Level 2

Paragraphs

Learning how to break your stories and essays into paragraphs is a confusing but important job.

Before you begin

You can break a piece of writing into paragraphs after you've written it, or you can do it as you go. Doing it as you go is the best choice, but you might not be able to do that right off the bat.

How to do it

There are a few standard times to make a new paragraph:

- When you start in on a new topic
- When you skip to a new time
- When you skip to a new place
- When a new person begins to speak
- When you want to produce a dramatic effect

New Topic

This one's mainly for essays. Every time you go on to a new topic, you should make a new paragraph.

New Time

This one--and the rest--are mainly for use in short stories. Whenever you skip some time, that will probably be the right place to make a new paragraph. If you find yourself using phrases or sentences like these, you are skipping some time:

- Later that day,
- The next morning,
- Five hours passed.
- They waited and waited.
- Life in Yate remained unchanged.
- The seconds seemed like hours.

New Place

Scenes in stories generally happen in one place. When the characters go to a new place, a new scene happens. At the very least, a new paragraph happens. Any time you have a "Meanwhile, back at..." phrase in your story, make a new paragraph.

New Speaker

If you're doing a good job, your short stories are going to have dialogue, or characters talking to each other. Dialogue helps bring stories to life. Every time you switch speakers, you make a new paragraph. Sometimes this means that your paragraphs are really short, because all a character might say is, "No." If that's all he says, though, that is as long as the paragraph needs to be. Another thing to remember is that, if you put the "he said" phrase before the quote, or you character does some action before he speaks, you should make that part of the same paragraph as the quote.

Action That Serves As Part of the Dialogue

A good writer will break long stretches of dialogue up with snatches of action. This is good for the rhythm of the piece. Changing things up makes the conversation flow smoothly, at least from the reader's standpoint. It also helps make a picture in the reader's mind by inserting just the right detail to bring the scene to life. The last reason for using this kind of paragraph break is that people don't always reply with words. Sometimes they shrug or make a face or ignore the other speaker entirely.

Dramatic Effect

Sometimes you simply want a paragraph to stand out, or you want to slow the reader down and control the pace of the story. At times like this, you can make a brief sentence--or even a word--an entire paragraph. Just don't overdo it; this gets old fast.

Here are some examples, excerpted from the novel Kate Macready and the Pirates. They are colour coded when possible to show which type of paragraph break is being used: **yellow** for new topic, **brown** for new time, **purple** for new place, **light blue** for new speaker, **dark blue** for an action that takes the place of some dialogue, and **green** for dramatic effect.

The one good thing I could see was that the water was so shallow where the Narwhal went down that, once I broke clear of the ship, I didn't have far to go to reach the surface.

It was long enough, though.

By the time I broke the surface, I had almost given up hope, but I found myself in the air and took a huge, gulping gasp. I splashed around, happy just to be alive. That's when the hand reached down and grabbed me.

Before I had a chance to think, I had been hauled into a small boat and dumped there like a load of fish. I opened my eyes and was surprised--and happy--to see Jeremy staring down at me.

"You made it," he said.

I nodded.

"Did you get the map?" he asked.

I sat up, outraged. "Is that all you can think about?" I demanded.

"No. Of course not. But did you get it?"

I pulled the map, now waterlogged, from the folds of my shirt and tossed it to the floor of the boat. Jeremy looked visibly relieved.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I--I think so," I said.

"What happened to...uh, to Diablo?"

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Fact sheet - Level 2

Writing a Balanced Argument

It is important that we can express our opinions in a balanced and calm way.

Use the following structure to help you write a balanced essay on the subjects of either capital or corporal punishment. (Remember which is which! You don't want to hang people for not doing their homework!)

"It is about time we brought back capital/corporal punishment". Do you agree with this view?

- Explain what the term capital punishment or corporal punishment means.
- Explain the views of people who agree with the subject.
- Explain the views of people who disagree with the subject.
- Explain which views you agree with and why.

The following paragraph links and signposts may help you to structure your writing:

1.	Also	Furthermore	Additionally	Moreover	
2.	Firstly	Secondly	Finally	Later	Next
3.	Similarly	Likewise	By comparison		
4.	However	On the other hand	In comparison	Alternatively	
5.	Although	Except for	Other than	If only	
6.	For example	For instance			
7.	Consequently	As a result	Therefore	Hence	
8.	In conclusion	As we have seen	To summarise	Overall	

You must:

- write in a formal style
- write in paragraphs
- open your essay in an interesting way
- punctuate sentences clearly
- explain your points very clearly
- use paragraph links and signposts

You should:

- include complex sentences
- use the passive voice
- write in the present tense

You could:

- begin with a fact or statistic
- use specific examples to back up your views

"It is about time we brought back capital/corporal punishment".
Do you agree with this view?

Corporal/capital punishment is

.....

.....

.....

.....

There are a number of reasons why.....

.....

..... Firstly

.....

..... Secondly.....

.....

.....

.....

However

.....

.....

.....

.....

I agree with

.....because.....

.....

.....

.....

Closing Paragraphs and other aspects of structure

How to Organize an Excellent Paragraph

1. Start your paragraph with a **topic sentence**.

Topic sentence = a sentence that explains what you are going to write about.

2. Add **supporting sentences**.

Supporting sentences = more information about your topic. One way to do this is to imagine your topic sentence as a question and then ask yourself: How can I prove this is true? What examples can I give?

3. End with a **concluding sentence**

Conclusion = an ending sentence that explains what your paragraph is about.

If you want to, you can add a concluding comment after the concluding sentence.

Find the **topic sentence**, **supporting sentences**, and **concluding sentence** in these paragraphs.

Winter

Winter is my favorite season because I like the clothes, the food and the activities. In the winter, I can wear a big coat and my favorite sweater. When it's cold, I can eat hot foods and soup. I can drink hot chocolate too. Best of all, in the winter I can do a lot of activities. I can play in the snow and make a snowman. I can go skiing, ice skating, or stay at home by the fireplace. That's why winter is my favorite season.

My Wonderful Sister

My sister Doris is very friendly, patient, and smart. She can make friends with anyone, because she is very funny. Doris is friendly to everyone, so she has a lot of friends. She is also very patient. She can help children, even when they are crying. If she has to wait at the grocery store, she doesn't get angry. She just starts to talk with the other customers. Another great thing about Doris is that she is smart. She studies a lot and gets good grades in school. She is also very good at solving problems. This is why Doris is a great sister.

American Food

American food is fast, cheap, and tasty. Some countries have food that takes a long time to make, but Americans like to eat food that is really fast, for example: hot dogs, hamburgers, and sandwiches. American food is not too expensive, if you work in the U.S. It is more expensive than in some countries and less expensive than in other countries, but I think it is pretty cheap. Some people don't like American food, but I think it tastes good. You can put ranch dressing on everything to make it taste delicious. If you are looking for food that is fast, cheap, and tasty, you should try American food.

Find the topic sentences, supporting details, and conclusion:

Tests

I don't like tests. Every time I take a test, I feel nervous. When I study for a test, I don't know if I will be able to get a good grade. I worry a lot about the test, so I can't sleep. After the test is over, I worry about my grade. When my teacher gives me my grade, I can't relax because I know I will have another test soon. Tests give me a lot of stress. That's why I don't like tests.

This paragraph is missing the **topic sentence**. Read the paragraph and choose the best topic sentence:

Cats

.....

You don't have to take a cat for a walk every day like a dog. Cats also know how to clean themselves, so you don't have to wash them. If you want to go on vacation, you can leave some food for your cat and it will be okay. A cat can sleep on your bed and keep you warm at night. That is why cats are good pets.

- A. Cats are very clean animals.
- B. A cat is a good pet.
- C. Cats and dogs are good for children.

This paragraph is missing the **concluding sentence**. Read the paragraph and choose the best conclusion.

Halloween

Halloween is a traditional American holiday. Americans celebrate it every year on October 31. Children dress in Halloween costumes and go trick-or-treating. Adults have parties and decorate their homes. The stores sell a lot of candy and things that are black and orange. People eat donuts and drink apple cider. They also carve pumpkins to make jack-o-lanterns.

-
- A. Children love to eat candy on Halloween.
 - B. You can dress as a mummy, a witch, or a princess on Halloween.
 - C. These are the traditions of Halloween in America.