

Writing Paragraphs

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences (or, it could be just one sentence) that expresses a single point.

What is a point?

This is a looser definition. A “point” can expand or contract depending on the level of details you have in your writing; it depends on the depth you go into on the document you are writing.

So, how do you know when to start a new paragraph?

The best way is to think of a new paragraph as a ‘shift’ of ideas, progression, or ‘point’ from the previous paragraph. Be aware of when a point transitions into a new one; that’s the time for a new paragraph.

What’s a topic sentence?

“The main point of the paragraph is nearly always in the topic sentence—a one sentence summary of the paragraph.”

Where is the topic sentence?

This sentence sometimes comes first, sometimes in the middle, sometimes at the end, and sometimes not at all. It depends on how explicit or directive you need to be about the point of your paragraph.

Two Tips for Paragraphing

Look for Transition Words

If you use words that create transitions, you probably should switch to a new paragraph.

Some examples:

- Also
- In addition
- Likewise
- For example
- Besides
- In short
- First (or Second or Third)
- In contrast
- However

The ‘Visual Breath’ Test

The indentation--or blank line--that indicates paragraphs is a signal to our brain to pause for a moment and assimilate or ‘digest’ the information that it has just read.

If there is too much information in one paragraph, the brain starts to ‘suffocate’ and cannot process anything.

If there is too little information, too many short paragraphs, the brain starts to ‘hyperventilate’ and can’t follow the information.

“The point is that every sentence in the paragraph needs be working towards the same point.”

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