

A. The Paragraph

The structure of a text is the sequence of ideas it contains and how it is put together. No text will make sense unless it is structured clearly.

1. Definition of Paragraph

According to the online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a paragraph is “a section of a piece of writing, usually consisting of several sentences dealing with a single subject. The first sentence a paragraph starts on a new line.”

Paragraphs are, then, groups of related sentences serving three important purposes:

- Paragraphs join together sentences into a unit that works to support an essay's main idea or thesis.
- Paragraphs provide breaks that allow readers to pause and make sense of what they are reading.
- Paragraphs indicate the movement or development of ideas in an essay.

2. Types of Paragraphs

Each new paragraph contributes important new information that moves a reader one step closer to an essay's main idea or thesis. Writers use four types of paragraphs

- **Introductory paragraphs** identify an essay's topic, give basic background or contextual information, and indicate the writer's purpose for writing, approach to the topic (including the scope of treatment), and thesis.
- **Body paragraphs** provide the main development and support of an essay's main idea or thesis
- **Transitional paragraphs** connect the various body paragraphs together and join the body of an essay to the introduction and conclusion.
- **Concluding paragraphs** review an essay's main points, discuss the significance of those points, and sometimes point ahead to future treatments of the topic.

3. When to paragraph?

- To signal a shift in focus.
- To signal a shift in time or place.
- To signal the next step in a sequence of steps.
- To add particular emphasis to important ideas.
- To set off a new person's contribution to an unfolding dialogue.
- To set off introductory and concluding material from the body of an essay.

4. Paragraph Unity and Continuity

Just as paragraphs work together to develop a thesis, the sentences within an effective paragraph support and extend one another to develop a single idea. Thus, you can think of a paragraph as a kind of “mini-essay.” Like a full essay, an effective paragraph:

- presents a clear main or controlling idea
- supports or develops that main idea
- arranges ideas and supporting material in an orderly pattern, and
- uses logical associations and transitions to link one idea to the next

a) Paragraph Unity

As a rule, every effective paragraph has an explicit **topic sentence**, which is stated at or near the beginning and to which all other sentences in the paragraph are logically related. We refer to that logical relationship as **paragraph unity**. To test for paragraph unity, ask yourself how each sentence of a paragraph helps support or develop the topic sentence of that paragraph.

b) Paragraph Continuity

Continuity, or the linkage between sentences in a paragraph or between paragraphs, requires writers to write each new sentence or paragraph with the adjacent sentences and paragraphs in mind. The reader must feel that one sentence or paragraph has grown naturally out of its predecessor and leads naturally to what follows.

It is a good idea to make these relationships between sentences and paragraphs explicit by using cohesive ties (e.g., word repetition, related words, pronouns, and demonstrative adjectives) and transitional expressions. Some common relationships and transitional expressions that can be used to bring those relationships up to the surface include: **addition** (e.g., moreover, in addition, furthermore), **likeness** or **similarity** (e.g., similarly, likewise), **contrast** (e.g., however, but, on the other hand, nevertheless), **exemplification** (e.g., for example, for instance, e.g.), **consequence** (e.g., therefore, thus, as a result, accordingly), **sequence** (e.g., first, next, finally, subsequently), **restatement** (e.g., that is, in other words, i.e.) and **summary** (e.g., to conclude, in summary, overall)

5. Practice

Task One: Read the paragraph and discuss the questions that follow.

Glenn Gould is widely regarded as Canada’s most famous and eccentric pianist. He is renowned for his recordings of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. For example, Bach’s Goldberg Variations, Gould’s first recording, was among the best-selling classical music albums of its time. Gould is also famous for his unusual behaviour. He would only play concerts while sitting on an old chair his father had made, and he usually hummed while he played. Contrary to most pianists, he disliked playing in concert halls, and devoted most of his career to the recording studio until his death in 1982. In brief, Glenn Gould was an unconventional pianist who made a significant impact on the world of music.

1. What is this paragraph about?
2. What is the topic sentence? How is it different from your answer to question 1?
3. What are the details that support the topic sentence?
4. What transitions are used? What is the purpose of each transition?

5. What is the purpose of the concluding sentence?

Task 2: Number the sentences below (from 1 to 5) to form a paragraph. On each line, write *topic sentence, supporting detail or concluding sentence* to indicate the sentence's purpose. Then write the paragraph in order, adding appropriate transitions.

(.....) Hydroelectric power is a valuable source of renewable energy. _____

(.....) Nickel is another natural resource used in the making of stainless steel as well as coins. _____

(.....) These are just a few of the resources Canada offers. _____

(.....) Canada offers a variety of natural resources that are used for different purposes. _____

(.....) Timber is used for building materials and furniture. _____

Adapted from

- The Little, Brown Handbook, 11th Edition, 2010, 72-111.
- Academic Skills: Writing Paragraphs and Essays (2010)