

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph can be a stand-alone text but most often it is a smaller part of a longer piece of writing. A paragraph isn't just a string of sentences. It consists of a group of sentences which are all about the same point or idea (see Connecting your ideas: Linking words Quick Guide). Using paragraphs is a way of breaking a longer piece of writing into smaller, more manageable bits. Each of these parts has a role to play in relation to the whole. For example, in the body of an essay each paragraph explains or develops one main point or part of a main point. While each paragraph in an essay develops its own point it also connects to other paragraphs to help tie the whole essay together. It is the connections between paragraphs that give an essay its logical structure so that the whole essay makes sense as a unit and does not read like a bunch of disconnected bits that have been thrown together.

While some paragraphs can be one sentence these are rare. There is no set number of sentences that should be in a paragraph, three would be a good rule of thumb as a bottom limit. This is because, to do their job, paragraphs usually need at the very least two sentences. You need one sentence to introduce the main point of the paragraph and then you need to add information which provides evidence in support of or gives examples of the main point.

The parts of a paragraph

There are three main parts that a paragraph can have: a **topic sentence**, which introduces the main idea of the paragraph; one or more sentences which develop the main idea in the topic sentence; and, often, a **summary** sentence, which summarises the information in the paragraph.

Topic sentence

A good paragraph starts by telling the reader what the main point of the paragraph is going to be. This sentence is called the **topic sentence**. It is the most general sentence in the paragraph and tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. Often the topic sentence begins with a word which connects (see Connecting your ideas: Linking words Quick Guide) the paragraph back to either the previous paragraph or to the **introduction**. For example, in the **sample body paragraph** below the word **moreover** links the paragraph back to the previous paragraph.

Development

After the topic sentence will be sentences which relate to the topic sentence. These sentences can provide arguments, evidence and examples to support the topic sentence. The sources of arguments and evidence should be cited properly.

Summary sentence

A summary sentence is kind of an optional extra. If it is there its job is to summarise the sentences used to develop the main point and to link back to the topic sentence.

Different types of paragraphs

In nearly all university essays you will find three basic types of paragraphs: **introductory** paragraphs, **body** paragraphs and **concluding** paragraphs. These are a little bit different from each other because they have different jobs to do.

Quick Guide

What is in this guide

- What is a paragraph?
- The parts of a paragraph
- Different types of paragraphs
- Sample introduction
- Sample body paragraph
- Sample conclusion
- Related Quick Guides

Introduction

The job of the **introduction** is to point forward to what is going to happen. Your introduction should tell the reader what is going to happen in the essay and what your essay is going to be about. The **introduction** has three to four main sub-parts.

It gives an **orientation** to the topic, usually by restating the topic of the question. You should also define any **key terms** in the topic.

It tells the reader your position in relation to the topic. This is often called a **thesis statement**. For example, in an **argument** type essay, where you are asked to take a side, you should say whether you are **for**, **against** or **neutral** towards the topic.

Your introduction should then identify and list each of the main points you are going to raise in your discussion in the same order that you are going to raise them in the body of your essay. You should not develop any points or present any arguments or evidence in the introduction.

Body

Each paragraph in the **body** of your essay should take up either a main point or part of a main point you have identified in the introduction and develop it. A paragraph in the body of your essay should have a topic sentence, some sentences which develop the topic sentence and (optionally) a summary sentence. A body paragraphs should either connect back to the introduction or connect back to the previous paragraph.

Conclusion

Your **conclusion** then, in a way, tells the reader what your essay has been about. It summarises what you have found out, discovered and concluded. Where the introduction predicts for the reader what is to come, the conclusion reinforces for the reader the main points of the body. The **conclusion** ties the essay together by pointing backwards and connecting back to the **introduction** and **body**.

Sample paragraphs

The sample paragraphs below are all taken from the same essay on the following question:

What is meant by globalisation? Discuss the effects of globalisation on at least two of the following: trade, manufacturing, consumerism, international relations, cultural identity.

Sample introduction

Here is the **introductory** paragraph.

Since the end of the Cold War and the triumph of capitalism as the world's dominant economic system globalisation has become a growing phenomenon. The term globalisation describes the increasing contact and interdependence among national economies and the increasingly international nature of markets, capital, labour and technology. Globalisation has brought with it a rapid increase in international social, cultural and technological exchange. Despite concerns about the detrimental effects of globalisation on developing nations and cultural identities, the interdependence of national economies and societies continues to increase. This paper will argue that the effects of globalisation on trade, manufacturing and international relations cannot really be avoided and can be viewed as both positive and negative depending on who is doing the viewing.

The parts of the introduction are colour coded:

Orientation to topic, definition, thesis statement, main points to be developed

Sample body paragraph

Here is an example of a *body* paragraph from the same essay. The paragraph takes up and develops the main point about the effect of globalisation on *manufacturing*.

Moreover, even within the developed world, not everyone benefits from globalisation. The ease of movement of manufacturing industries resulting from globalisation is leading to increased insecurity in the workplace in developed countries. There is an increasing trend for manufacturers to shift production overseas to low-cost economies such as China and India. As a result manual workers in developed countries are finding their jobs increasingly threatened as companies shift their production offshore. While shareholders benefit from this change in manufacturing practice the increased unemployment which results from moving manufacturing offshore places a cost on society as the workers who lose their jobs, their families often come to rely on social welfare services, which are paid for by all taxpayers. Therefore, in some cases, something that provides a benefit to a relatively small number of individuals also incurs a cost to society as a whole.

The parts of the paragraph are colour coded:

Linking word

Topic sentence: links back to *thesis statement* in the *introduction*

Development:

links back to *thesis statement* and *main point* identified in the *introduction*
arguments linking back to *topic sentence*

Summary sentence: Summarises the arguments and links back to the topic sentence

Sample conclusion

Here is the *concluding* paragraph from the same essay.

In conclusion this paper has shown that globalisation is an increasing and inevitable phenomenon and that it can be seen to have both positive and negative effects on trade, manufacturing and international relations. The exchange of information and technology ensures that new technologies will be developed that will further increase the international reach and availability of markets, capital, labour and technology, growth in international trade, investment and capital flows. Concerns about the negative effects of globalisation on third world domestic markets, loss of employment in first world countries, increases in the gap between high and low incomes and international tension between free-market and protectionist approaches to trade remain unresolved. In spite of this the nature of globalisation causes trade to be an essential element for continued growth and expansion. Because of the requirements that this interdependence brings international relations and labour market practices must improve as we increasingly rely on one another for our own development or the effects of unresolved conflict will be far reaching.

Linking words

Topic sentence: links back to *thesis* and *main points*.

Summary sentences: summarise the discussion.

Final summary sentences: state the conclusion or resolution to the discussion.

Related Quick Guide

Connecting your ideas: Linking words