

Paragraphs

What Is a Paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of several sentences that present and then discuss a **single topic**. A paragraph conventionally has three parts:

1. a **topic sentence** that expresses the main point or focus of the paragraph
2. several **supporting sentences** that discuss that main point
3. a **concluding sentence** that wraps up the discussion

Example from a Personal Essay

(1: Topic Sentence) Later that summer, we went to the beach for a few days. (2: Supporting Sentences) I had never been, but my cousins went every year. The whole ride up, they kept telling me I'd love it and told me all about the sand castles they always made. They got me excited too, and by the time we got to the beach, I was ready to jump out of the car and start having fun. But then I found out I hated sand. It was either wet and mushy or dry and so hot it nearly burned my feet, and it got in every crease and crack. Worst of all, it tasted terrible. (3: Concluding Sentence) The whole day was miserable, and on the ride home, I swore I'd never go to the beach again, and I have kept that promise to myself to this day.

Example from a Literary Analysis

(1: Topic Sentence) In *Humania, Queen of the Humans*, Deanna Wallace defies the "barbarian bombshell" trope by giving Humania hypermasculine traits. (2: Supporting Sentences) For example, one of the running gags in the graphic novel is Humania's notably broad shoulders and ballooning muscles making it virtually impossible for her to enter or exit a building without doing structural damage. Moreover, she speaks in flat-faced grunts in most panels, her only displays of strong emotion coming in the form of battle rage, as if anger were the one emotion she is capable of expressing. (3: Concluding Sentence) These exaggerated depictions of stereotypically masculine traits lampoon the likes of Conan the Barbarian and Khal Drogo, but they also defy the unspoken rule of the barbarian bombshell: that she can be muscular, tough, and aggressive—in short, "masculine"—but only to a lesser degree than her hypermasculine male counterparts.

Example from an Argumentative Essay

(1: Topic Sentence) Beyond being a nuisance to local homeowners, the Appalachian swamp duck has driven an important native species, the MacGuffin's minnow, to near extinction. (2: Supporting Sentences) Cruz et al. found that "since the duck was first brought to Washington in 2029, the MacGuffin's minnow population has dropped by 89% as a result of the duck's intense predation" (42). The MacGuffin is now nearly impossible to find in the wild. This has severely disrupted the food chain of the minnow's native irrigation pond biome (Cavendish 26). Moreover, the swamp duck actively negates attempts to rehabilitate the MacGuffin population.

According to Agbani and McIlroy, "Despite conservation efforts, the minnow cannot repopulate because releases of the fish trigger feeding frenzies in the swamp ducks" (17). The swamp duck problem is so severe that attempts to rebuild the minnow population only feed the ducks and help them thrive, further endangering the pond ecosystem (3: Concluding Sentences) For that reason, the Appalachian swamp duck population must be greatly reduced in order to bring back the MacGuffin and heal our local ponds. That being the case, the proposed bounty on the swamp duck offered to licensed hunters is a reasonable and necessary course of action.

Paragraph Tips

- Paragraphs can vary in length, but the important thing is that they stay focused on one point and discuss it thoroughly enough to get that point across to the reader.
- You can start a new paragraph whenever you change topics, move to the next event in a narrative, or want to break up a wall of text into easier-to-read chunks.
- In essays, the concluding portion of the paragraph can be a particularly good place to tie the point made in the paragraph back to the main point of the essay.
- Introduction paragraphs often follow a similar pattern as presented in this handout, but they generally aim to establish the topic in a way that gets the reader interested, support that with background and context on the topic, and then conclude by stating the main idea of the piece.
- Conclusion paragraphs often return the reader's attention to the main topic of the piece, support that by synthesizing the supporting ideas presented in the body paragraphs, and concluding the piece as a whole by pointing to the main idea's relevance and significance, suggesting next steps, or calling the reader to respond in some way.
- Quotations, paraphrases, and other pieces of cited information usually belong in the support section of a paragraph, where they can be paired with sentences that analyze, interpret, and discuss that borrowed material.
- Paragraph breaks in fiction tend to be applied more stylistically and the paragraphs they create might not have all the elements presented here.

Note: All examples on this handout are fictional, as is the information therein.

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