

Paragraphs

WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is a group of sentences that fleshes out a single idea. In order for a paragraph to be effective, it must begin with a topic sentence, have sentences that support the main idea of that paragraph, and maintain a consistent flow.

An effective paragraph

- presents a single idea
- begins with a topic sentence that makes this single idea evident
- contains support in form of sentences that convey this single idea
 - is strategically organized to maintain flow
 - maintains your essay's objective
- informs and entertains your reader about your paper's overall idea.

Note: different disciplines have different requirements of what a well-written paragraph may entail. You should always consult your professor before beginning any writing assignment.

Essential Elements

There are four essential elements that an effective paragraph should consistently contain: unity, coherence, a topic sentence, and sufficient development.

Unity

In order for a paragraph to maintain a sense of unity, the paragraph must focus solely on a single idea, point, or argument that is being discussed. Therefore, the paragraph should not begin to stray and develop new ideas. If you begin to write sentence that wander from the paragraph's main idea, then it is time to start a new paragraph.

Coherence

Coherence is more commonly referred to as the flow of your writing. When a paragraph flows, the reader will be able to understand the main idea that you have presented. How can you ensure that your paragraph maintains a flow? Well, after presenting your main idea in your topic

sentence, each sentence following must build upon each other in an organized manner. After writing your paragraph, go back and read aloud what you have written to make sure your ideas are clearly presented. If they are, you have developed a coherent paragraph!

The Topic Sentence

The topic sentence is the most important part of your paragraph; it tells the reader the general idea of your paragraphs and should essentially “hook” them into wanting to read more! The topic sentence helps to provide a “general summary” for your paragraph. A reader should encounter the topic sentence and have a general idea of what the paragraph will continue to discuss.

Sufficient Development

Now that your paragraph has a topic, it is essential that this topic be sufficiently developed. Do not limit yourself to a set number of sentences. Yes, your paragraph should not be too short or too long, but it should be an appropriate length to flesh out the entirety of your paragraph’s idea. A reader should not be left with questions after a sufficiently development paragraph. In order to achieve this, you can provide examples, cite work, provide necessary definitions, describe, analyze, and organize your ideas.

Am I ready for a new paragraph?

All writers struggle with when to begin a new paragraph. Yet, in order to maintain coherence, writers must know when to make the transition to the next paragraph. If a new idea comes into your writing, you must begin a new paragraph. A new idea should only be presented in a new paragraph. If not, the coherence of the paragraph will suffer. New points should begin in the topic sentence of the next paragraph. You can also begin a new paragraph to contrast the ideas presented in the prior paragraph. Sometimes, you may have a paragraph that has become lengthy—a page or more—and needs to be broken apart to maintain the stamina of your work.

Find a place where your support is fully developed and create another paragraph that will complete the ideas presented prior.

TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

There are four types that are ideally suited for this genre. Each has different characteristics that’ll work best in different areas of your book, as explained below:

Expository Paragraph Type:

This type is used to inform and educate the reader (however, it’s not meant for you to express your opinion).

Descriptive Paragraph Type:

This type is used to paint a picture in the reader's mind.

Narrative Paragraph Type:

This type is used to bring the reader along your character's emotional journey.

Persuasive Paragraph Type:

This type is used to convince the reader to side with you and your beliefs.

Each one of the four paragraph types fulfills a different purpose:

The expository paragraph type is used to convey well-researched findings to back up your solution in a way that *establishes you as an expert* in the reader's eyes.

The descriptive paragraph type is used to *paint vivid pictures* in your reader's mind of someone like them, both before and after they apply your solution.

The narrative paragraph type is used to take your reader through an emotional journey from problem to solution, as lived by the characters in your case studies.

The persuasive paragraph type is used to convince your reader why your solution will be different than any other than they might have tried in the past.

Let's now go over each paragraph type in detail:

Characteristics of the Expository Paragraph Type

The expository paragraph type is used to build your credibility as an expert. You'll achieve this goal by presenting facts, statistics and other data required to back up your solution.

What is This Paragraph Type Not Used For?

This paragraph type is not used to express your opinion or to influence your reader. Try to stay away from "*loaded words*" that carry a high emotional charge, since they'll create a conflict with the factual nature of the type.

Expository Paragraph Example

"The fundamental question of work and leisure raised by Weiss is particularly relevant as a generation called Millennials moves firmly into the workforce. I know many Millennials and in general they're hard-working, passionate young men and women who are eager to work, but they want to enjoy and draw meaning from their jobs. Most are sensible enough to have a day-job to pay the bills, but many have a "side hustle" – a hobby or a business idea into which they pour their passion and hope to one day monetize. Weiss recognizes this trend in workers, but an interesting disconnect between Weiss' article and today is the discussion of self-employment.

Weiss notes that self-employed workers are generally most satisfied even if they earn less, but also makes the observation that self-employment has significantly declined.

In this example the [author](#) is using expository paragraphs to present and analyze research findings by a recognized expert in the field.

1. Characteristics of the Descriptive Paragraph Type

As the old adage says, a picture is worth a thousand words, and this is where the descriptive paragraph type comes in handy. One of the best devices to engage your reader's senses is to paint a clear picture of how your solution will work in their life.

The descriptive paragraph type is not only used to engage your audience's five senses but also their feelings. Your goal is to engage your reader so closely that they feel they're actually "*there*." This is a powerful literary device used to great effect in the fiction genre and you'll be borrowing from it for your nonfiction book.

What is This Paragraph Type Not Used For?

This paragraph type is not used to narrate. In other words, the descriptive type is never used to tell a story or to give insights into the thoughts or the emotional state of characters in your book.

Descriptive Paragraph Example

"Coming down to Bridge Park had been a good idea, he decided. Leaving the crowded mass of the city behind he'd ridden the train south, through the razed land and out onto the delta. Rice paddies stretched to every horizon, blurring the line between land, river and sea. And then, in the shadow of the ruined supports of the bridge, the park rose like a garden oasis above the lowlands. He obviously wasn't the only person with the same idea today, and the park was lifted by the shrieks of children playing on the bridge replica fun zone behind him."

In the above passage, the author is using the descriptive paragraph type to paint a picture in the mind of the reader by using specific adjectives and adverbs that appeal to the reader's senses.

2. Characteristics of the Narrative Paragraph Type

Narrative writing can be used very effectively in problem-solving nonfiction through the power of story-telling. [Nonfiction books](#) without any story-telling are not as engaging as they could be.

Use stories to create an emotional connection with your readers by making them become invested in characters that they can relate to – characters that also "*feel their pain*." They could be about yourself, past clients, or fictional characters that combine the experiences of multiple clients.

What is This Paragraph Type Not Used For?

The narrative paragraph type is not used to introduce facts and figures and it's not used to influence or persuade your audience.

Narrative Paragraph Example

“Christopher Reeve was one courageous person who fully accepted an unexpected change in direction in his life. The icon of superhuman strength in the 80’s, he was the quintessential Superman. An actor of great appeal and talent, he represented the ideal combination of manliness, strength, seeker of justice, and savior of humankind. In May 1995, he was riding his horse and had a serious fall. The accident damaged his spinal cord such that he was left a quadriplegic and had to use a machine to help him breathe. The accident sent shock waves around the world. How could Superman be rendered a quadriplegic? It was unfathomable. After many months of grueling physical therapy, he learned how to function in this new altered state. The emotional toll was great as he and his family struggled with the changes this accident brought into their lives. Within a year, however, he had founded a charitable organization called the Christopher Reeve Foundation in order to raise money for research on spinal cord injuries and made it his mission to find a way for all victims of these devastating injuries to walk again.”

Here the author is using the narrative paragraph type to portray the dramatic fall in the fortunes of a celebrity after a traumatic life event, and how he resolved the conflict in his life to become a real-life superhero in the eyes of his followers.

3. Characteristics of the Persuasive Paragraph Type

The persuasive paragraph type can be used to great effect in [problem-solving nonfiction](#) books. Your goal is not just to communicate and teach new skills, but also to persuade your reader to take action and implement your solution in their lives.

You want to persuade readers by appealing to them on an emotional level and using your connection and your credibility as an expert to convince them to side with you. The aim of persuasive writing is to align your reader’s goals with your own.

What is This Paragraph Type Not Used For?

Doing anything that takes your reader out of the plane of reality – such as by going into a detailed description of places, circumstances or events or into a deep narrative.

4. Persuasive Paragraph Example

“I’m too old’ or ‘It’s too late to change’ are nothing but limiting beliefs. Like any other beliefs, they’re fully under your control and are totally replaceable. In the end, you’re the one who truly runs the show, as much as you’re taught to believe the opposite. When it comes to making changes in your life, you have the ultimate say. If you end up doing what others think you should, it’s only because on some level you’ve made the decision to believe that their ideas are more

worthy than your own. If you want to change, you have to start believing in what you want to do, no matter what other people's 'opinions' are. And you have to believe that the changes you want to make are worth it, regardless of your age or your circumstances. Life consists of a collection of 'moments.' This very moment and every moment after it are what your life is made of. If you live your life worrying about the future, regretting the past or even living how others tell you to live, then you aren't living 'your' moments. All it really takes to become in charge of your own life is to simply decide to do so. Your process of reinvention is 100% yours. Don't be afraid to use it fully to our advantage. Don't be afraid to think big thoughts. Remember, you can make a difference: you are the difference!"

In this example, the author is using persuasive writing to influence readers to take action by changing their belief system through replacing limiting beliefs with empowering ones.