

Body Paragraph Development

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how different types of sentences work together to form effective body paragraphs in an essay. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Role of Body Paragraphs in Essays
2. Structure of Body Paragraphs
 - 2a. Topic Sentences
 - 2b. Supporting Sentences
 - 2c. Concluding Sentences
3. Paragraph Structure in Action

1. Role of Body Paragraphs in Essays

A **paragraph** is a building block of an essay; it provides support for one main point of essay's thesis. Therefore, a strong paragraph spans several sentences, but tackles only one central idea.

While there's no such thing as the correct number of sentences in a paragraph, a paragraph can be too long or too short. It all depends on what purpose the paragraph is supposed to serve in the writing project. In general, though, most paragraphs tend to be about three to seven sentences.

As with the sentences in a paragraph, there is no correct number of paragraphs for an essay; the number should reflect the needs of the essay itself and the author's goals, which are always going to vary from essay to essay and from person to person.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If your thesis has three main ideas, you will need at least three body paragraphs. If your thesis has four main ideas, you will need at least four body paragraphs.

Still, it's important to note that many academic essays will follow the five-paragraph format, meaning there will be three body paragraphs between the introduction paragraph and conclusion paragraph.



TERM TO KNOW

Paragraph

A collection of sentences within a piece of writing, connected by a single focusing idea.

2. Structure of Body Paragraphs

To better understand how paragraphs work within essays, you need to know how they are structured. In general, each paragraph should have:

- A topic sentence
- Some supporting sentences
- A concluding sentence

We will now look at these sentence types in more detail.

2a. Topic Sentences

All paragraphs should begin with a **topic sentence**, which is the sentence that most clearly expresses the main idea of a paragraph.

In many ways, the paragraph is like a miniature essay, and like an essay, a paragraph's main idea often comes at or near the beginning. It is often the topic sentence that starts a new paragraph, with the remaining sentences following it as support.

Having focused paragraphs with solid topic sentences helps to anchor readers within the text and make it easier for them to absorb the writer's ideas rather than having to pay attention to how those ideas are being shown.

For the writer, having focused paragraphs with solid topic sentences is also useful; during the revising and editing process, it's easier for the writer to look at each paragraph and see whether or not the single idea it states supports the main thesis of the essay. This question is much easier to answer - whether yes or no - when the paragraph itself is clearly focused.



TERM TO KNOW

Topic Sentence

A sentence that expresses the main idea of a paragraph.

2b. Supporting Sentences

If a topic sentence is the central thesis of the paragraph, what does that make the following sentences? In writing, they are referred to as **supporting sentences**. These are the sentences in a paragraph that support its main idea.

Supporting sentences exist to explain or demonstrate the truth of the topic sentence, and they can do so through the expression of ideas, facts, data, logic, or other means of support.

When writing, it's important to pay attention to what each supporting sentence is contributing to the paragraph as a whole. It's equally important to cut, change, or relocate irrelevant sentences - any that don't do enough to support the thesis - even if they are interesting or relevant elsewhere, or for other purposes.



TERM TO KNOW

Supporting Sentence

A sentence that bolsters the main idea of a paragraph by providing intellectual support.

2c. Concluding Sentences

Finally, most paragraphs will end with a **concluding sentence**, which is a sentence that either summarizes the paragraph or helps the essay flow to the next paragraph.

In general, the concluding sentence will do more than just rehash the topic sentence. It will also add something new to the paragraph by reminding the reader of how the supporting sentences help support the main idea that the topic sentence presents.



TERM TO KNOW

Concluding Sentence

A sentence that either summarizes a paragraph or signals how the essay will flow into the next paragraph.

3. Paragraph Structure in Action

Looking at a sample paragraph can help you see how each of those structural elements functions in action. The paragraph below is from the body of an essay about the reasons why many people love sandwiches. See if you can find the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence as you read.

One reason why people love sandwiches is because of how adaptable, or changeable, they are. Sandwiches can be made on any kind of bread, from a tortilla to rye to white. Moreover, they can include almost any filling, making them an easy choice for vegetarians, meat lovers, and anyone else. Since they can be made to each person's desires, they can also be enjoyed at any time of the day, using breakfast staples like eggs in the morning or heartier fare for dinner. Thus, sandwiches are adaptable in both form and function, proving that just about anyone can love them.

Did you find the topic sentence? It's the first sentence of the paragraph: *One reason why people love sandwiches is because of how adaptable, or changeable, they are.* This sentence clearly tells us the main idea of the paragraph, which in this case is one reason why people love sandwiches (that they are adaptable).

The supporting sentences should then be focused on explaining why or how sandwiches are adaptable. This paragraph has three supporting sentences: *Sandwiches can be made on any kind of bread, from a tortilla to rye to white. Moreover, they can include almost any filling, making them easy for vegetarians, meat lovers, and*

anyone else. And since they can be made to each person's desires, they can also be enjoyed at any time of the day, using breakfast staples like eggs in the morning or heartier fare for dinner.

Each of these three supporting sentences offers something that supports the main idea without just repeating that main idea. They add more new and important information that helps develop the main idea, such as that sandwiches can be made with many different types of bread and fillings, and can be eaten at any time of day. These points show how sandwiches are, in fact, adaptable as the author claims in the topic sentence.

Finally, we have the concluding sentence: *Thus, sandwiches are adaptable in both form and function, proving that just about anyone can love them.* This sentence drives home the point that the supporting sentences aim to prove, and gives the paragraph a sense of finality.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **role of body paragraphs in essays** is to express a single, focused idea through several well-crafted sentences. The **structure of body paragraphs** includes a **topic sentence** that expresses a main idea, **supporting sentences** that provide evidence to sustain that idea, and a **concluding sentence** to sum up the main idea of the paragraph or signal what is coming next. You also looked at an example of **paragraph structure in action** to see how these sentences work together effectively.

Best of luck in your learning!



TERMS TO KNOW

Concluding Sentence

A sentence that either summarizes a paragraph or signals how the essay will flow into the next paragraph.

Supporting Sentence

A sentence that bolsters the main idea of a paragraph by providing intellectual support.

Topic Sentence

A sentence that expresses the main idea of a paragraph.