

Paragraph Development

Paragraphs are important units to any text. Typically, students think that paragraphs are defined by a set number of sentences. Though paragraphs commonly do contain multiple sentences, the number is not essential. The real essence of a paragraph lies in its focus and cohesion. That is, paragraphs should focus on one main or controlling idea.

- 1. Write a topic sentence that declares your paragraph's controlling idea.**
 - Often, students will forget to signal the main paragraph topic for a reader and choose instead to head straight into the bulk of the writing. Omitting a topic sentence can also cause the writer to deviate from the main topic, which will certainly confuse the reader.
 - **Example:** *College degrees create more opportunities for graduates.*
- 2. Explain or elaborate on the controlling idea.**
 - Often, the topic sentence needs some explanation and specificity. Write a sentence or two that explains more specifically your rationale for including the controlling idea.
 - **Example:** *Some types of employment simply require a college degree even if the job is unrelated to the type of degree an employee holds.*
- 3. Give some specific support to back up your idea.**
 - Here, you could use an example or some secondary source material, such as a quotation.
 - **Example:** *For example, my brother recently applied for a job in sales. He has been working in sales for over ten years and has very successful numbers as a salesperson. The company that was hiring thought he was a good candidate, but they would not hire him simply because he did not hold a college degree.*
- 4. Explain your specific support.**
 - This step is important and often overlooked. Show your readers how the example or other support ties in with the paragraphs controlling idea
 - **Example:** *My brother's example illustrates just one of the ways in which a college degree can provide more opportunities for graduates because the job would have been his if he had any kind of degree.*
- 5. Conclude the paragraph.**
 - Finally, you want to show your readers how the paragraph's main idea connects back to the overall idea of your paper (think thesis).
 - **Example:** *Ultimately, these opportunities outweigh the high cost of tuition.*

Other suggestions to consider:

- **Consider the purpose of your paragraph.**
 - Though the above formula works well, the best advice is to be aware of what you are attempting to do with your writing. Be aware of the purpose of your writing.
- **Think about how the rhetorical modes can help organize your purpose.**
 - For more on rhetorical modes, see our handout discussing them. This paragraph uses exemplification.
- **Use transitions both between paragraphs and within paragraphs.**
 - The best writing flows smoothly and makes connections between the ideas it presents. Transitional expressions help to create these conditions.