



Paragraph Structure and Purpose

Paragraphs are used to help your reader **follow the logic** of your argument. They should not be too long (generally speaking, paragraphs that are longer than 3/4 of a page are probably too long) or too short (one or two sentence paragraphs probably haven't given your reader enough information). When you begin a new idea—perhaps a point that contrasts with one you were just discussing—or when you are raising a related but separate point, it's probably time to start a new paragraph.

In addition to containing clear, discreet thoughts, a paragraph should serve a specific purpose. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I trying to say in this paragraph?
- How am I trying to say it?
- Am I expanding on a previous point? am I qualifying a statement? am I restating something? supporting it? concurring? describing? comparing? contrasting?

Here are some suggestions for how to think about what your paragraph is doing (this list is not exhaustive!):

<i>Describing</i>	Naming one or more features of an object or concept, to help the reader imagine it precisely or understand it fully.
<i>Exemplifying</i>	Giving an illustration of what is meant by a previous statement or giving a concrete instance that will help make the point credible.
<i>Comparing and contrasting</i>	Examining objects alongside each other for the purpose of clarifying their features, evaluating them or noting differences and similarities.
<i>Narrating</i>	Telling a story describing an event or series of events
<i>Evaluating</i>	Making judgment about something discussed previously
<i>Synthesizing</i>	Combining elements of previous paragraphs into a coherent whole; often this includes presenting a new perspective on the subject.
<i>Summarizing</i>	Restating the principal idea or the outline of an argument or point already introduced.





<i>Stating</i>	Making an assertion.
<i>Restating</i>	Putting into different words an assertion already made for purposes of clarification and/or adjustment or emphasis.
<i>Supporting</i>	Providing evidence for an assertion.
<i>Concurring</i>	Agreeing with another author's assertion.
<i>Qualifying</i>	Restricting the meaning of an assertion already made.
<i>Conceding</i>	Acknowledging the presence of a fact or perspective that calls into question that author's own assertions.
<i>Negating</i>	Offering reasoning or evidence to demonstrate the falsehood of an assertion.
<i>Expanding</i>	Stating at great length or more comprehensively an idea or assertion already expressed.
<i>Analyzing</i>	Breaking an assertion down into its constituent parts in order to clarify or evaluate it.
<i>Defining</i>	Stating the meaning of a word or words previously or subsequently used.