

Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

WRITING: PARAGRAPHS

A well-written paragraph is unified, developed, coherent, and complete

A well-written paragraph is unified:

- Is introduced by a topic sentence which clearly expresses the main idea
- Contains supporting details (examples and illustrations) which develop only one idea
- Has a summary sentence that restates the main idea, extends it slightly, and includes a transitional phrase to connect it to the following paragraph

A well-written paragraph is developed:

- Provides reasons for making the assertion
- Defines, divides, and classifies sections of general statement
- Analyzes, compares, contrasts the divisions or classifications by cause and effect, or by steps

A well-written paragraph is coherent:

- Each statement relates to the main idea
- Uses spatial relationships and words like: Between, beyond, over, under
- Uses chronological relationships and words like: Within a [decade], now, still, before
- Uses general to specific relationships and words like: For example, to illustrate, to demonstrate
- Uses specific to general relationships and words like: Conclusively, overall, we can determine, in summary
- Uses transitional words like: Moreover, furthermore, in addition
- Uses parallel structures of clauses, sentences and ideas

A well-written paragraph is complete:

- Is only as long as necessary but is no longer
- Can stand alone by stating a theme, supporting details, and summaries or conclusions
- Fully develops the main idea
- Can move to a new paragraph idea through a smooth transition

Reading your well-written paragraph aloud:

Reading aloud often helps detect punctuation errors; a rise or fall in voice frequently signals a need for punctuation. Exaggerate pronouncing each word to check for obvious spelling errors. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to check spelling and word choice.

As you read aloud, ask:

- Does the paragraph have a clear, main idea?
- Does the sentence connect with the main idea and other sentences?
- Does the sentence refine, explain or add something new?

If you answer no to any of the above questions, the paragraph or sentence needs reworking.

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Different types of paragraphs:

1. **Narrative** — Tells a story.
2. **Descriptive** — Shows qualities that support the main idea or dominant impression.
3. **Example** — Begins with generalization which is supported by specific examples — Uses phrases like for example, for instance.
4. **Definition** — Identifies what something is and what it is not; focuses on specific characteristics of a subject; identifies something in a general category and then distinguishes it from other items in the same category.
5. **Comparison/contrast** — Similarities and differences are compared on a specific basis; paragraph then alternates from one contrast to another, marking similarities or differences — Uses transitional phrases like: On the other hand, likewise, similarly, but.
6. **Process** — A process paragraph is like a “how to do it” manual; moves from project start to finish.
7. **Classification** — Divides something by category and then groups elements under each category. Make sure all major categories are mentioned.
8. **Causal analysis** — Relates two events by asserting the occurrence of one event to be the reason for the occurrence for the other. Cause refers to event in the past; effect usually analyzed as a future event.
9. **Argumentation** — Persuading another to your view — uses most of the other styles.