

Basic Paragraph Organization



A paragraph is not a collection of random sentences. Effective paragraphs are organized to move the reader through ideas in a logical way. The organization of your ideas, even at the paragraph level, builds your credibility as a writer and improves the quality and validity of your work. This handout provides guiding principles for organizing paragraphs, but always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

Elements of an Organized Paragraph

Topic Sentences: A paragraph is a grouping of sentences that form a cohesive idea. A topic introduces the the main idea or claim of the paragraph. Often, the topic sentence also connects to the main idea of the paper. Additionally, the topic senetence is generally the first sentence of a paragraph, so it may also be a transition from the previous paragraph.

Evidence and Supporting Details: After introducing the central idea or claim of the paragraph in the topic sentence, support the idea or claim with evidence. Evidence can be quotes, examples, statistics, personal experiences, logic, or any other material that is acceptable for the assignment and supportive of the paragraph's idea or claim.

Analysis: Providing analysis is the process of demonstrating how your evidence proves your point. It includes commentary that reveals connections and context and often links back to your overall main idea or thesis.

Concluding Sentences: A paragraph should end with a strong concluding sentence that links the paragraph back to your overall idea or thesis, reinforces the sub-claim or idea made in your paragraph, and prepares the reader to transition into a new paragraph.

Connection to Central Idea or Claim: One central idea, claim, or thesis statement should drive the direction of the entire paper, and every paragraph should support or connect to that central idea or element.

Basic Paragraph Example

A diagram showing a paragraph enclosed in a black rectangular box. Four labels with lines pointing to specific parts of the paragraph are positioned around the box: "Topic Sentence" on the left points to the first sentence; "Evidence and Supporting Details" on the right points to the middle section of the paragraph; "Analysis" on the left points to the section starting with "It is Orlando's composure"; and "Concluding Sentence" on the right points to the final sentence.

As important as it is for Rosalind to demonstrate her independence, it is equally important for Orlando to play the part of a romantic hero. In the article "Shakespeare's Romantic Heroes: Orlando Reconsidered," Thomas Kelly explains that Orlando is not just a random match meant to showcase the dominant figure of Rosalind, but that he is also perfectly suited to her and totally in control of himself, making himself into a typical romantic hero (14). It is Orlando's composure at the hands of Rosalind's constant verbal attacks that demonstrates the calming qualities that make Orlando such a good match for the feisty Rosalind. In proving himself to Rosalind, Orlando isn't merely bending to her will, but rather demonstrating the qualities he already has that make him well suited to her. It is only when the two come together that their complimentary attributes shine, signifying that they are stronger as a pair than they will ever be individually.