

Paragraphs

What to put where

Paragraphs are related sentences bundled together to make a point. They should have at least three sentences and begin on a new line. Each paragraph has one main point or idea throughout. As the topic sentence, this idea is usually expressed in one sentence at the beginning of the paragraph. Each sentence in the paragraph expands on the topic sentence, providing evidence and justification for that one idea.

Structure

- **A topic sentence**

This is your own idea, as developed through your research on the topic. It must be expressed in your words, and not an idea from a cited source.

- **Supporting evidence**

These sentences are cited theories, examples or information from other sources that help justify/support your topic sentence idea. For more information, refer to the helpsheet, 'Incorporating Evidence in to your Writing'.

- **Linking words/phrases**

These are words or phrases that make your ideas flow from one sentence to another. For more examples, refer to the helpsheet, 'University Speak'.

Example: components of a paragraph

Key: Topic sentence Linking words/phrases Supporting evidence

Companies that produce video games, as well as many gamers, claim there is no link between increased violence in the community and violent video games. To support their opinion, they cite studies by psychologists which indicate that gamers are no more likely to commit violent crimes than non-gamers. Specifically, a report by Braxton College in the United States found that among 234 gamers, arrest and conviction levels for any form of crime were actually 8% lower than from non-gamers (Malone, 2012). Indeed, both those who produce and those who play the games claim they are being unfairly blamed for the problems of society (Falloy & Croydon, 2011). As Carrox (2013) points out, no one would ever demand that books with violent themes should be blamed for their negative influence.

Organising your paragraphs

In the body section of essays, reports and similar assignments, your paragraphs should be presented in a logical order according to how one main idea or topic connects with the next. Planning your paragraph topics before you start writing the paragraphs will help you to achieve a logical order.

For example, you may want to discuss some advantages of gaming, some negative effects of gaming, and some perceived negative effects of gaming (such as the perceived link of violent video games and real-life violence, as per the paragraph above). By planning out your paragraphs in advance, you avoid getting your ideas mixed up.

As a general rule, begin a new paragraph when you want to do any of the following:

- When you start or end a part of your argument
- To introduce a new idea or point, or to contrast information or ideas
- To break up an overly long paragraph

Remember: one paragraph = one idea

Activity 1: Identify the components

The components of the following paragraph are jumbled. First, identify the topic sentence. Next, order the remaining components into a paragraph that flows logically.

1. For example, in a study by Dukakis, Bellm, Seer and Lee (2007), students expressed moderate satisfaction with current TAFE and university teaching and learning arrangements.
2. Specifically, it has been identified that there is a large contrast in assessments between the two programs. Fulcroft and Gibon (2008) claim that students regard university essays as considerably more complex and challenging than assessments they had previously encountered in their TAFE programs. These challenges prompt the need for additional support for this group of students.
3. One area of pressure for students making the TAFE–university transition is the difficulty of studying under a university model.
4. However, they also found gaps between the two programs, and identified difficulties they experienced in bridging them. “Students appreciated the greater depth of curriculum at university, but indicated that support to cope with the high level of independent study would be useful” (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer & Lee, 2007, p. 63).

Check your answer at the bottom of this page.

Activity 2: Break the text into paragraphs

The following text discusses two different things. First, identify where the topic changes. Next, find the point where it would be most appropriate to break it into two separate paragraphs.

A large number of developing countries still allow the procurement of antibiotics over-the-counter, without any professional oversight. The likelihood that these antibiotics are being used correctly without the proper guidance of a medical professional is low. Davies and Davies (2010) also suggest that many countries are receiving antibiotics that are already ineffective in western nations, contributing to the problem for these countries locally and for the wider global community. It should be noted though, that some developing countries are starting to more tightly regulate access, with Chile banning the sale of antibiotics without a prescription and India trying to create an accreditation system to assist in regulating the use of antibiotics (Chatterjee & Fleck, 2011). In the absence of appropriate regulation, further awareness of the problem and education on their correct usage may assist. Public awareness of the problem is crucial but, in some places, people may be better informed than professionals give them credit for. A study in the UK found that a third of the public believe that antibiotics will assist their recovery from a cough or cold (Cliodna, Boyle, Nichols, Clappison, & Davey, 2007). The other side of this is that two thirds of people in the United Kingdom are aware that antibiotics are not required in the case of a viral infection. It would appear that the awareness campaigns in the UK have been somewhat successful (Cliodna et al., 2007). Unfortunately, Cliodna et al. (2007) also indicate that a survey conducted by the UK Department of Health found that knowledge of correct antibiotic use did not make any significant difference to the likelihood of a person being prescribed antibiotics. While very few people would argue against public awareness and education, it is not enough on its own.

Check your answer at the bottom of this page.

Other helpsheets available

- Writing in an Academic Style
- Topic Analysis
- Structuring your Essay

Answers:
Activity 1: The correct order is: 3, 1, 4, 2
Activity 2: “Public awareness of the problem ...” should be the beginning of a new paragraph.