

PARAGRAPH (BASICS)

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PARAGRAPH?

Below are a few different characteristics of good paragraphing....

INDENTATION

Paragraphs are typically indented. That is, the first sentence of the paragraph is tabulated over a minimum of five-character spaces from the left margin.

ADEQUATE MATERIAL

Paragraphs traditionally have enough material for a topic sentence (or introductory), supporting sentences, and a concluding (or transitory) sentence.

SELF-CONTAINED UNITS

Paragraphs are “self-contained” meaning that when extracted from the entire document, a single paragraph can stand on its own (with its own meaning, purpose, and content). Moreover, paragraphs should be written in a way that the paragraph (as a whole) can stand alone without much help from preceding paragraphs or the paragraphs that follow. Therefore, a paragraph is a self-contained entity. The only exceptions are deliberate transitory elements (such as sentences at the end of the paragraph which foretell of incoming ideas, etc.).

QUESTIONS: HOW LONG SHOULD A PARAGRAPH BE?

Honestly, no definitive guidelines exist for paragraph length. However, I recommend a paragraph be, at least, five sentences minimum. My rationale: If you tend to write shorter paragraphs, many professors will put forth the criticism that your ideas may be underdeveloped. Moreover, some professors are under the impression that paragraphs should be a particular length.

QUESTIONS: CAN I START A PARAGRAPH WITH A QUESTION?

Absolutely. In fact, questions work as some of the best topic sentences. Remember: Sentences can be questions too (interrogative sentences).

PARAGRAPH ARRANGEMENT OR ORIENTATION?

Not all paragraphs are supposed to support main ideas, and if they do they are not always required to possess the same orientation. Sometimes, varying the orientation of the paragraph and its contents can be good, even beneficial for the reader.

MAINTAIN A CONSISTENT VERB TENSE

In a single paragraph, the tense remains consistent.

MAINTAIN A CONSISTENT POINT OF VIEW OR SPEAKER

In a single paragraph, the point of view remains consistent.

First-Person Voice:

Uses self-identifying nouns/pronouns and terminology (singular and plural), such as I, Me, My, Our, We, Ours, Us

Second-Person Voice:

Uses nouns/pronouns which identify the person being addressed, such as You, Yours, You All

Third-Person Voice:

Uses nouns/pronouns which identify other people, places, or things which are being addressed, such as He, She, It, They, Them, Their, etc. In addition, third-person includes proper names of address, such as people's names, the names of places (cities, states, countries, etc.), etc.