

Paragraph writing

The importance of paragraphs

At university, paragraphs are the basic unit or building block of extended pieces of writing. Paragraph writing is a key skill that enables you to incorporate academic research into your written work. In an essay or report, each paragraph should have its own clearly identified topic which relates to the argument or case you are developing.

Paragraphs in academic writing consist of a main idea, or topic, which is explained, elaborated, supported by evidence, and illustrated through the use of examples. Paragraphs are characterised by increasing specificity; that is, they move from the general to the specific thus increasingly refining the reader's understanding. A common structure for paragraphs in academic writing is as follows.

Paragraph Structure Model

Topic Sentence (Main Idea)

The topic sentence or main idea of the paragraph should relate to the overall issue your writing addresses. Often it will be expressed as an assertion or claim which supports the overall argument or purpose of your writing.

Explanation/ Elaboration

The main idea must be elaborated and its meaning explained. Think critically, do not just describe the idea.

Evidence

These explanations must include evidence to support your idea. This information should be paraphrased and referenced according to the appropriate referencing style of your course. Refer to the USQ library guide to referencing
<https://www.usq.edu.au/library/referencing>

Concluding sentence

Should explain why the topic of the paragraph is relevant to the essay or report question and links to the following paragraph.

Paragraph Example

"Graduate registered nurses require more than clinical skills to meet the needs of patients". Critically discuss this statement. Relate it to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) competency standards.

Topic sentence

*Transition words

Critical thinking (student's voice) & concluding sentence

It is important for graduate nurses to develop good communication skills to provide safe and supportive patient environments. Boyd and Dare (2014, p. 62) argue that empathetic communication is a vital skill if nurses are to provide quality patient care. **They add**, the ability of the nurse to communicate is important to ensuring the patient's overall hospital experience is positive. **This is supported by** ANMAC competency standard 9.2 which states that nurses are required to communicate "...effectively with individuals/groups to facilitate provision of care" (ANMAC, 2010). **As nurses spend more time than doctors with patients, the ability to communicate is an essential graduate attribute.**

Further explanation with evidence source 1 (Boyd and Dare)

Further explanation with evidence source 2 (ANMAC)

Adding critical thinking – your own voice

After adding evidence to support your idea ask the “so what question” to draw an inference or conclusion for the reader. This shows you have understood the point you are making and are not just inserting facts.

How to make your paragraphs flow smoothly and logically

Use **transitions (linking words and phrases)** to connect your ideas between paragraphs and make your writing flow. The order that you structure your ideas should reflect the structure you have outlined in your introduction.

For the example essay topic (above) you may have indicated in your introduction that the aspects to be covered were communication skills; cultural competence and ethics therefore the next paragraph logically should address cultural competence. This can be done simply

“The second skill necessary for graduate nurses is cultural competence” or “In addition to communication skills, graduate nurses need to be culturally competent”

***Transitions** can also be used within a paragraph to help integrate multiple references. This demonstrates your ability to understand and **synthesise** academic literature.

Transition Words and Phrases					
For continuing an idea	For providing a contrasting view	For showing Cause and Effect	For showing sequence	For concluding	For restating a point or giving examples
Additionally... In addition... Moreover... Because Consequently... Clearly, then... Furthermore... In the same way... Continuing this idea... Also... Pursuing this further...	In contrast to these... Unlike the previous example... Different from this... Despite these findings... However... Contrary to these findings... In opposition to... Nevertheless...	Following... In response to... Therefore... As a result of... For this reason... The result... Thus... Due to this... Consequently... The reaction...	The first [concept/aspect]... The second [concept/aspect]... The third [concept/aspect]... Firstly, Secondly, Finally After...Afterwards... As soon as... In the first place... In the meantime... Later... Meanwhile... Next...	Therefore... This..... Hence... In final analysis In conclusion... In final consideration... Indeed...	In other words... Specifically... For instance... For example... One such occurrence... This is demonstrated by To illustrate... Also... To demonstrate... This is supported by...

Check if your paragraph is effectively structured -Ask

- Does your paragraph have a clear main idea?
- Is the main idea sufficiently general to generate a whole paragraph?
- Is everything in the paragraph related to the main idea?
- Do the sentences join together smoothly?
- Is the main idea adequately developed and explained?
- Have you included evidence to support your main idea?

Need more help?

USQ Library Study Support can help you to develop your academic learning language and maths skills for success at university. Consultations are available face-to-face, via video chat, by phone or email.

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