

Paragraph Construction

Note: this handout concerns the paragraph as a part of Academic Discourse.

In academic discourse, careful attention to good paragraph construction is essential to the production of strong writing. In most cases, good paragraphs contain specific information that supports all or part of an essay's main point (thesis).

Evaluating paragraphs

GOOD: clearly focused, well-developed, organized
BAD: no main point, rambling, too long or too short

Rules for good paragraphing

- Rule #1: **Focus on a main point.** The main point of a paragraph should usually be found in its first sentence. This acts as a topic sentence or mini-thesis for the paragraph. **STICK TO THIS POINT THROUGHOUT THE PARAGRAPH.** Sentences that do not support the main point create choppy, rambling paragraphs.
- Rule #2: **Develop the main point sufficiently.** This is directly related to paragraph length. Although paragraph length will vary by essay, there are some general rules to go by: think of three-sentences as a bare minimum (which is often far too short); two pages is an absolute maximum (which will most likely either bore or confuse a reader).
- Rule #3: **Chose a pattern of organization.** While there is an almost infinite number of patterns, some common patterns of organization include: 1) example(s) followed illustration(s), 2) narration (often chronologically or thematically arranged), 3) comparison followed contrast (or vice versa), and 4) cause and effect.
- Rule #4: **Make paragraphs coherent.** This rule incorporates the three previous ones and is also related to consistency (in structure, point of view, verb tense, etc.), using good transitions, and using parallel structures within the paragraph.