

Writing & Editing Strategies

Check the structure of your writing

Introductions, main body, conclusions

Are you clear about what each of these is designed to do?

Could you define "what is a paragraph"?

How should a paragraph be structured?

What kinds of paragraph might you write?

What is the purpose of your paragraph? There are many other types of paragraph that can be written. Is it to provide:

1. a definition/explanation of a term or concept;
2. discuss an example;
3. present arguments for or against a point (you could have a paragraph on arguments for and one about the arguments against - or they may be combined).

Checklist

Grammar and Spelling

1. Check your spelling - use the spellchecker but be aware that it will often not recognise specialist terminology (you should be able to add these though - but check for accuracy when you do so!). Additionally, it will not necessarily know what you intended to say: so you could have a word spell correctly but it will not be appropriate for the context.

2. Check your grammar - as your guidelines advise you, the grammar checker on Word is not very sophisticated and can be confusing. Use this with caution. However, some tips below may help you manage your sentences and clarity of ideas.

3. Allow time to read your writing through at least a couple of times.

4. Make sure each sentence has a subject - what is your sentence about? It should make a point; present a piece of information. Make sure you are clear what that point is so that your reader will be able to understand it as well.

5. See if your subjects and verbs agree with each other - check for plurals and singulars.

6. Check the verb tenses of each sentence - be consistent about when things happen/happened.

7. Make sure that each sentence makes sense.

Style and Organization

1. Make sure your paragraph has a topic sentence that establishes what it is about, or its purpose. You should be able to sum up the topic in a small number of keywords or a phrase. If not, perhaps you haven't been able to identify what the overall focus is (sometimes you can become too focused on detail and miss the purpose of the paragraph). Alternatively, you may have more than one topic under discussion in the paragraph and it may need splitting into two or more.
2. Make sure your supporting sentences focus on the main topic - do they provide context, detail, and refer to appropriate evidence (a source/reference).
3. Make sure you have a closing sentence - this could link your writing to the next paragraph.
4. Check that all your sentences focus on the main topic - set up the topic; give detail/evidence; make a conclusion or link to clarify how it fits with the next paragraph. When you read consecutive paragraphs, they should logically follow on from each other, building to communicate a series of related topics in order to answer your question.
5. See if your paragraph is interesting and is clear.

Handy tips for managing sentences/paragraphs

A. Pressing the Control key at the same time as the 'F' key will bring up a dialogue box to help you search and find words or punctuation marks in your writing.

Searching for full-stops: If you check for where full-stops appear in your text, this can give you some clues about the length of your sentences. Review them to see if they are too long or too short. A sentence that is more than 4 lines of typed text will probably be unclear and have more than one idea.

B. Read material aloud, or better still, get someone else to read it to you. Sometimes we read what we think we wrote, rather than what is actually on the page. Reading aloud can give you a sense of how clearly you have phrased your argument.

C. Use the button that can show/hide where paragraphs are in your text. (It looks like a backwards 'P' with an extra vertical line). Each time you hit 'Enter', Microsoft Word reads this as an instruction to insert a paragraph break. It can be worth checking that you are not putting in unnecessary paragraph breaks. It can be difficult to spot these if the final line of a paragraph ends close to the right hand margin of a line.

What is a paragraph?

Each paragraph deals with a distinct point or subject. The opening sentence should indicate what this is. You should develop this subject through elaboration, analysis and illustration: that is, you should provide EVIDENCE of why this is important enough to warrant discussion in a paragraph.

How long should a paragraph be?

Minimum – approximately 3 or 4 sentences

Maximum – approximately 2 or 3 paragraphs per page of A4 text

These are not strict guidelines or rules. As you grow in confidence as a writer and develop your own style, you may find that you are able to combine writing very short paragraphs and very lengthy paragraphs.

How do I know when to start a new paragraph?

When you start discussing a new point or subject, you should begin a new paragraph. For example, if you are discussing the three structural elements of a paragraph you may have a separate paragraph on each element. However, if paragraphs are just one of the topics in your overall subject, you may decide to have just one paragraph on the topic. In this instance, you would describe the three elements much more briefly.

* **Key Point** – a paragraph should never discuss more than one clearly defined topic. If you are arguing about causes and effects you should really have one paragraph on each. Avoid combining these into one paragraph as you may be too brief otherwise: remember you need to be analytical and evaluate information so it would be difficult to discuss cause and effect in one paragraph.

Visual checking for paragraphs

Look at your text via 'Print Preview'. You can opt to view more than one page at a time. Looking at two pages at a time can help you spot where you have long and short paragraphs, especially where they overlap across two pages. For example, you may have a paragraph that begins at the end of a page, but then doesn't complete until three-quarters down the next page. This could indicate your paragraph is too long and perhaps does not have a clear focused topic. Equally, if your text is very 'bitty', it can alert you to thinking whether you need more detail or further examples. It may be that information you have separated into a series of short sentences under a number of headings, could be joined underneath one heading.

How to link paragraphs together

a. Refer to previous sections

Use similar language at the end of a paragraph / start of a new paragraph

"...as we shall try to argue in this chapter, it is constituted by a peculiarly modern form of consciousness." [End of paragraph]

[Start of new paragraph] "The peculiarity of sociological perspective becomes clear ..."

[from discussion of chapter entitled "Sociology as a Form of Consciousness"]

Here, the link with the previous paragraph is made by repeating two key terms with slight variations. 'Peculiarly' in the last sentence of the previous paragraph becomes 'peculiarity' in this one. Similarly, the frequent use of the word 'sociology' in the previous paragraph becomes 'sociological perspective' here. This kind of repetition of key terms keeps the reader focused and makes the argument clear.

The paragraph goes on to describe the way that sociology uses the term 'society' in a special, more precise sense.

b. Expand or restate what 'this' or 'it' means when used at the start of a new paragraph.

c. be explicit about the purpose of examples and tell your reader what they are there to achieve (what point do they illustrate?)

Linking paragraphs together

For adding things on

again... also... in addition... as well as... moreover... furthermore... still... next... what is more... and

To give examples

for example... for instance... one example is... to illustrate... namely... as an illustration... in this case

To contrast

however... but... although... despite... nevertheless... on the contrary... yet... even so... even though... on the other hand

To repeat

as I have said... as has been said... as has been noted... moreover... furthermore

To show argument

therefore... thus... because... evidently... although... meanwhile... in conclusion... however as a result... moreover... at this point... consequently... since... hence

To emphasise

indeed... in fact... certainly... especially... particularly... unquestionably... without any doubt... definitely

To make a concession

whilst... although... even though... however

To put things in sequence

first... firstly... second... secondly (etc)... then... after that... following... again... and... and so forth... and so on... subsequently... later... finally... thereafter... to conclude... lastly

To sum up or conclude

finally... as a conclusion... to conclude... all in all... in other words... in short... in brief... to sum up... as I have said... as has been stated... on the whole... in general

Using 'This' Or 'It'

[When you shift to a new paragraph make it clear what 'this' or 'it' may refer to.]

Example: if the essay is on the Conservative Party and its policies, and the last paragraph has been about the way the Party makes objections to the European Community, how should you put the link in the beginning of the next paragraph?

DON'T PUT: This is a major part of Conservative thinking.

DO PUT: This hostility to Europe is a major part of Conservative thinking.

Using Questions As Links

Avoid using questions at the end of paragraphs as this is generally avoided in academic writing.

Repetition And Reiteration

You can repeat key words or phrases from the previous paragraph to make a link; you can also use 'reiteration' - saying the same thing in a slightly different way or by using collective nouns instead of the individual items (e.g. you could reiterate 'calcaneus, talus and metatarsals' as 'foot bones', or 'extensor hallucis longus tendon, peroneus brevis tendon, and peroneus tertius tendon' as 'foot tendons').

The Right Number of Links

Have AT LEAST one link in between each paragraph and the one before it. Remember that you are very close to your writing - you know what you mean. However, the links between the different parts of your writing might not be as obvious to anyone else.