

What Is a Paragraph?

Hi. My name is Vivian and I am here to talk to you about writing a good paragraph. Let's start at the beginning.

This is what a written paragraph looks like on the page.

What if we ran the text all together without breaks? Would we still be able to find the paragraphs?

Yes! We could because a paragraph has an internal structure, and the visual separation of paragraphs on the page is just a way to represent something that is already there.

We can usually identify a well-formed paragraph by looking for these features:

- A *topic sentence* that states what the paragraph is about. The topic sentence can be anywhere in the paragraph, but is most often at the beginning.
- More sentences that talk about the same thing. This quality of staying on one topic is referred to as *unity*.
- *Coherence*, or the sense that all the parts seem to fit together to form a whole.
- A *concluding or transitioning sentence* that makes a connection to the next paragraph.

Paragraphs have been compared to building blocks because together they make a larger piece of writing such as a letter, an essay, a report, or a novel.

Another way to think of the paragraph is as a worker bee getting the jobs done around the hive, which is your essay.

The queen bee is the thesis statement, the guiding idea that shapes the entire piece of writing. We won't talk about developing thesis statements here, but you can get more information on them by clicking on the link to the left.

The important thing to remember is that when those worker bee paragraphs are doing their job, the result is something your readers will enjoy.

Every paragraph in your essay has a job to do. If you can't tell what a paragraph is doing, it's probably not doing anything.

What kinds of jobs do paragraphs do? We just saw that the *parts* of a paragraph each have a job to do—introduce, develop, conclude, make a transition.

Paragraphs have similar jobs *within* the essay: They introduce the essay by getting the reader's attention, and giving the thesis statement and some general background. They build and support the discussion, or argument, of the essay. Sometimes an entire

paragraph will take the job of transition. And you need at least one paragraph to provide a satisfactory conclusion.

Try saying what your paragraph is doing with an active verb. Pretend someone has asked, and you answer, “Paragraph A introduces, Paragraph B supports, Paragraph C explains, Paragraph D concludes.”

Just like bees, paragraphs have to cooperate and work well together to get the job done. We’ve talked a little about what paragraphs do. In the next video, we’ll look at *how* they do it. Before you go on, you may want to try the self test directly below this video to see what you remember about the nature of the paragraph.