

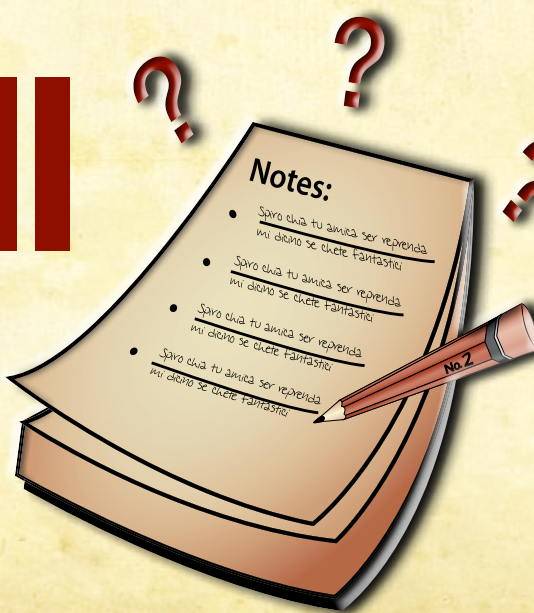
The WRITING CENTER

Elftmann Student Success Center

A Guide On How To:

Write a Paragraph

- What details should I use?
- What is the process?



Writing the Paragraph

Paragraphs are the basic building block for skilled technical writers. In clear concise statements, technical writers give definitions, explain a process, or present arguments

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences that support a main idea. In technical writing, the format is usually a topic sentence with 3-6 supporting sentences. A paragraph is more than a number of sentences, of course. To be an *effective* paragraph, it should have:

- a solid **topic sentence** that presents the topic and expresses a perspective
- adequate **development** of the topic using specific details
- a **closing sentence** that summarizes your paragraph

What specific details will match the purpose of my paragraph?

| Paragraph Type | Example Details | Example |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Process/ How-To | Steps Directions | Driving directions Assembly instructions |
| Time Chronology | Sequence of events Workflow process | Morning routine Development of a product |
| Illustration | Specific examples | Favorite foods Duties of an employee |
| Classification | Categories Common characteristics | Sections in a grocery store Organization of tools on design software |
| Definition | Unique features Personal definition of a concept | A vocabulary term Personal philosophy |
| Description | Vivid impression of subject Sensory Images | A favorite pet The noise of a troubled engine |
| Comparison and Contrast | Similarities Differences | Comparing two items to purchase How a technique has changed |
| Cause and Effect | Reasons for an event Consequences of an event | A car crash Troubleshooting problems |

| Paragraph Type | Example Details | Example |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Argument | Advantages/Disadvantages Data | Reasons for a decision Advantages of one product over another |
| Opinion Paragraph | Viewpoint and Observations Rationale | Editorial in a newspaper Evaluation of a new product |
| Narrative | Short stories Personal Experience | Personal journal Biography or Autobiography |

What is the process of writing a paragraph?

| Step | Example |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Read and note the details of your assignment. Highlight clue words in your prompt, and pay special attention to the paragraph pattern (definition, process, argument, etc.) you're asked to use.</p> | <p><i>Explain the advantages of nuclear energy.</i></p> <p><i>Advantages = argument</i></p> |
| <p>2. Brainstorm what you know about your topic.</p> | <p><i>Advantages of nuclear energy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>-good for the environment</i> <i>--available resources to make it</i> <i>-minimal waste</i> <i>-safer disposal</i> <i>-fewer emissions during creation</i> |
| <p>3. Create a word outline by choosing 2-3 related details to represent the key ideas you will present. Use the paragraph pattern table below to determine what kinds of details you will include in your writing.</p> | <p><i>All my ideas deal with the environment, and look like they are part of the process of making it.</i></p> <p><i>I. Environmental advantages of nuclear energy</i></p> |
| <p>4. Organize your list by deciding the order in which you will present your ideas. This could be chronologically, or in order of importance.</p> | <p><i>A. available resources</i></p> <p><i>B. fewer emissions</i></p> <p><i>C. safer disposal, minimal waste</i></p> |
| <p>5. Write a topic sentence that introduces the subject of your paragraph. In technical writing, writers often begin with a question and the supporting sentences answer the question.</p> | <p><i>I. There are significant environmental advantages to nuclear energy.</i></p> |

| Step | Example |
|---|---|
| <p>6. Create one sentence for each idea in your word outline. Try to tie each statement back to your topic sentence; this will also help your paragraph stay on target.</p> | <p><i>A. To start the process, there is a readily available amount of uranium on earth.</i></p> <p><i>B. Nuclear power plants emit significantly fewer emissions during the creation of nuclear energy.</i></p> <p><i>C. Once the energy is made and sold, the minimal waste is safely disposed of.</i></p> |
| <p>7. Write a closing sentence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarizes the ideas presented • Restates the main idea presented in the topic sentence in a different way • Asks the reader a question • Gives an opinion or conclusion | <p><i>D. These environmental advantages are reasons enough to increase the amount of nuclear energy used in the United States.</i></p> |
| <p>8. Revise your sentences, and decide how well they stay focused, if there's enough detail to believe your topic sentence, and how easy your paragraph is to read.</p> | <p><i>Read your paragraph out loud to listen for natural pauses, chopiness, or if you run out of breath.</i></p> |
| <p>9. Edit your paragraph for punctuation and capitalization errors.</p> | <p><i>Read your paragraph backwards and read for each type of error separately</i></p> |

References

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