

Writing Effective Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the building blocks from which a technical report is made. Authors must be able to construct effective paragraphs in order to write effective reports. By definition, a paragraph is a subdivision of a written composition that develops a single idea. Each paragraph contains one or more sentences. Sentences are well defined and have a definite structure. Paragraphs are less well defined. Their structure is flexible, and authors must learn how to put sentences together to form effective paragraphs.



Paragraphs serve three functions. 1) They provide logical breaks in subject matter. 2) They aid reading by physically breaking a composition into observable units. 3) They logically develop and complete the thought expressed in the topic sentence.

Paragraph length can vary considerably. Paragraphs should neither be too long nor too short. Many short paragraphs make a composition choppy. Paragraphs that are too long are hard to read. A good paragraph develops one idea within a length that is comfortable for the reader. By reorganizing and restructuring, paragraphs that are too short can be combined and long paragraphs can be divided.

The most important part of a paragraph is the **TOPIC SENTENCE**. The topic sentence usually corresponds to major subdivisions of the outline and states the subject the paragraph will cover. If each paragraph starts with a good topic sentence, a reader can very rapidly get the gist of a paper by reading only the first line of each paragraph. An effective way to begin writing a technical report is to develop a series of topic sentences from the outline. Later the idea of each topic sentence can be developed into a paragraph, and the first draft of the paper is done.

Although each paragraph presents a complete idea, and can therefore have meaning when read alone, it must also fit logically with its neighbors. A logical sequence of thoughts from one paragraph to the next is assured by starting with a well-organized outline. Then **TRANSITION WORDS** help bridge the thoughts from one paragraph to the next. Such words are especially helpful when separate paragraphs develop related aspects of the same idea. Words like although, nevertheless, besides, etc. lead the reader logically from one paragraph to the next, and tie the thoughts together.

Remember:

In writing a good paragraph,
Two things will help a lot;
An effective topic sentence,
And just one subject thought.

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