

Particularly Good Paragraphing

Developed for the BGSU Writers Lab by Sherri Wahrer



Knowing how to create well-developed, unified paragraphs is a part of the drafting process that is often taken for granted...especially in the initial stages, where you're more focused on just getting your ideas down on paper. Eventually, you're going to have to effectively organize those ideas, and knowing how to write good paragraphs can help you do that. Below are some tips to bear in mind regarding paragraph construction.

1. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence -- what specific idea or argument will the paragraph discuss? State it clearly up front! For instance, if you're composing an essay on various factors that influence children (and your arguments include music, upbringing, television viewing, and the school environment), introduce each argument at the beginning of its own paragraph: 'One factor that can influence children is music preference.'
2. Once you've nailed down your topic sentence, spend the rest of the paragraph developing points related to that sentence only.
3. Good paragraphs focus on only one point apiece. Don't try to include several points in the same paragraph; they'll all get lost in the jumble, and your reader will have a harder time focusing on each and distinguishing its importance. For example, if you're writing a paper about the effects of music, upbringing, television viewing, and the school environment on children, dedicate a single, well-developed paragraph to each of the four factors; that way, they all receive equal attention and stand out as independent ideas.
4. Use transition words and phrases in between paragraphs and within them to help guide your reader and connect your ideas. Some examples of transitions include the following: therefore, as a result, likewise, however, although, because, since, on the other hand, instead, for example, first, next, lastly, in addition to, and moreover. See page 197 in the Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers for a more complete listing of possible transitions.
5. In the larger scheme of things ('things' being your essay!), cluster paragraphs on similar ideas (i.e. arguments supporting your thesis) together and in the most logical way. For example, if you want to build up to something, save the most important information for last, and get the smaller, less important information out of the way first.
6. If you integrate a counter-argument into your paper in paragraph form, it's often a good idea to separate it from the paragraphs that support your thesis (tossing it in among paragraphs that argue the opposite has the potential to seriously disrupt a sound organizational pattern).