

Strong Paragraphs in Academic Writing

Types of paragraphs:

- Chronological/Narrative: the writer is telling a story in a manner so that the details/events are in chronological order as events happened.
- Descriptive: you are giving the readers information about what something or someone looks like/sounds like/smells like—the details still need to be organized in a logical flow.
- Instructional: you are telling about a process or describing how something works. You should follow the correct sequence in your paragraph so the reader could duplicate the action or activity.
- Dividing a whole into parts: the writer is starting with a large topic and breaking it down into its smaller parts. (Example: pets as a large category—following sentences break the category down into types of pets.)
- Academic: the writer states a point and give examples to prove the point. The writer determines the order of the examples while still giving the paper a smooth flow for the reader to follow.

What does a strong paragraph in an academic paper need?

- A main idea or focus for each paragraph (topic sentence/thesis sentence)
- Explain the idea. Unravel the idea or give the reader a reason you are saying it is true.
- Give an example to back up your explanation.
- Explain the example and how it relates to your topic.
- Finish the paragraph with a strong concluding sentence.
- Begin the next paragraph with a transitional sentence so the paper has an even flow for the readers to follow.

Potential problem: the paragraph has no topic sentence

Imagine each paragraph as a folder. The real content of the folder—the papers and notes—is in the middle. It includes all the evidence you need to make the point clear for the reader. The folder can get kind of messy if it's not made of something sturdy. Your readers don't know what to do with all the thoughts you've given them. So, the front of the folder (the first sentence of the paragraph) explains the topic (or main thought) of the paragraph. And, the bottom of the folder (the last sentence of the paragraph) tells the reader how the paragraph relates to the larger thesis of your paper.

Potential problem: the paragraph has more than one controlling idea

If a paragraph has more than one main idea, consider taking out sentences that relate to the second idea or splitting the paragraph into two or more paragraphs, each with only one main idea. Each paragraph of a paper should relate to one main point or thought related to the thesis.

Potential problem: transitions are needed within the paragraph

Writers should always include transitions between paragraphs or sections in a paper. This helps maintain a smooth flow for the readers. Sometimes transitions are also helpful within a single paragraph. These transitions can be single words or short phrases that help to shift between ideas or to create a logical flow of ideas in a paragraph. This can be especially true in paragraphs that offer multiple examples. You may need to add words or phrases such as: also, in addition, second, moreover, as well as.