

PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

ENGL 108 / SEC. H & I / SUMMER LEAP 2009 / OLDHAM & RUBASKY / CHANG & LEE

WEEK

1

Paragraphs are the meat of your argument. As Sherman Alexie says, paragraphs are “a fence for words.” They are where you present your most convincing ideas, and where you offer support for your main idea or claim. There are a few things to keep in mind when creating interesting and effective paragraphs.

- 1. Topic Sentences.** Always make sure that your paragraph addresses only one topic, and be sure to state that topic in the first or second sentence of the paragraph. That way your reader knows what the paragraph will be about and how it will support your main idea. Every paragraph’s job is to give a reason that supports your main idea, or claim. Therefore, every paragraph should put forth one reason that supports your claim, and then offer convincing evidence of how that reason supports your claim.
- 2. Convincing Evidence.** After you let your readers know what you are going to be talking about, you want to offer really convincing evidence that you are right. Look to authoritative sources like journals, newspapers, University press books, and case studies to help support your ideas. Be sure to use quotation marks and cite page numbers of these very important sources.
- 3. Original Commentary.** Although outside sources are interesting, in order to make a really convincing argument, you need to have some of your own ideas in there. The way to include your own original commentary is to explain to your readers how your evidence supports your claim, and why it is so convincing. Also, make connections for your readers and explain to them just how complex and important your claim is.
- 4. Conclusions and Transitions.** Paragraphs are almost like mini papers: your topic sentence is your intro, your evidence is the meat of the argument, and you need a little conclusion and transition to your next paragraph. Try to include a few sentences at the end of the paragraph that distill what you were trying to prove, and also make connections to the argument you will be presenting in your next body paragraph

Basic Paragraph Formula to Fall Back on in Times of Distress

Although we never want to reduce writing to a formula because it should be an exciting and creative enterprise, thinking in terms of formulae can be helpful when you get writer’s block. You can use the formula to fill in a missing or difficult paragraph, and then come back and revise it to make it more creative and more interesting.

Topic Sentence or Subclaim
Evidence 1
Commentary 1 (where you link the evidence to your reason and main claim)
Evidence 2
Commentary 2
Evidence 3
Commentary 3 (the amount of evidence you have will vary from paper to paper
and from paragraph to paragraph)
Conclusions
Transition