

# Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the basic structural unit of essays and other academic assignments. A paragraph is a short piece of writing in which all sentences are related. The first sentence expresses the point of the paragraph and all other sentences expand further on this point. The content of the paragraph therefore develops from a general statement to more specific statements. An academic paragraph is generally 4–7 sentences in length. The ability to write a well-structured paragraph will make a sound base for further academic writing.

## Paragraph structure diagram

**Main idea:** The point/issue of the paragraph is expressed in the first sentence of each paragraph

**Explanation:** A further explanation/clarification of the point/issue is provided in the next sentence or two

**Illustration:** The point or issue is supported with indirect quotes/paraphrases in the remaining sentence or sentences

## Paragraph practice

The following activities will allow you to become familiar with the construction of an academic paragraph.



### Activity 1

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Note that the first sentence of your paragraph should be the main idea of the paragraph. This main idea should be quite general and it is then expanded on in the rest of the paragraph. One of the important concepts in the course is **(to be inserted)**\_\_\_\_\_. From the course readings, decide what you are going to focus on in relation to this concept. Write this into a sentence. This is the main idea of the paragraph and all other sentences should expand or explain this statement.

Main idea:



## Activity 2

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Now expand on this idea in the rest of the paragraph. Take care that you do not just describe what the concept is and take care that you do not just summarise one or more of the readings that cover this concept. What you must do is actually explain your main idea that you developed in the first sentence. For practice, begin by explaining the main idea just in your own words without quoting or paraphrasing. It is best to close the text to do this in order to avoid the temptation to copy phrases directly.

Explanation: