



The Catholic University of America
Writing Center Handout

Paragraph Development

What is a paragraph?

Paragraphs are the building blocks of papers. A paragraph is a sentence or group of sentences that supports one main idea. This main idea should control what happens in the rest of the paragraph. **In an argument, these main or controlling ideas should always refer back to the paper's thesis statement to create a sense of continuity.**

How do I decide what to put in a paragraph?

- ✓ First, have in mind an overriding idea that you will try to convey throughout the duration of your paragraph. This idea will form the topic sentence.
- ✓ Make sure that all of the sentences in the paragraph relate to the topic sentence. This connection should be clearly explained within the paragraph.
- ✓ Finally, make sure that any quotes, evidence, or examples you incorporate into your paragraphs are introduced and explained so that your reader is not confused about how they connect with both the controlling idea in the paragraph and the thesis.

Try It:

Step One: Think of a main idea and write a topic sentence.

Don't forget that your topic sentence should clearly relate to your thesis. Sometimes it takes more than one sentence to fully explain your main idea.

Example: In order to combat the problem of school violence head-on, it is essential to provide students with better counseling services by allowing counselors to concentrate on the students and the school community.

Step Two: Explain the main idea.

Without using "I think," or "I believe," explain why you included this idea in the

paper. Essentially, you're illustrating the relevance of this topic to your reader and helping your reader to understand the connection between your topic sentence and your thesis.

Example: Creating a safe-place, such as a counselor's office, for students struggling with difficult issues provides an outlet for emotions that might otherwise end in violence. A counselor can also be a liaison between administrators, teachers, and students, facilitating much needed communication between members of the school community.

Step Three: Give a piece of evidence (or many pieces).

Now you need to support your main idea with solid evidence. This can take the form of quotations, statistics, anecdotes, current events, etc.

Example: Scott Poland, the president of the National Association of School Psychologists, writes that "administrators need to do more to personalize schools and provide better counseling services to students who may be troubled" (34).

Step Four: Explain the evidence.

Explain each piece of evidence and its relevance to the topic sentence. This explanation should clearly show readers why you chose to use that particular evidence. Also, be sure to explain the relationship between your pieces of evidence if necessary.

Example: Students need personal contact with their teachers and administrators. School counselors provide a valuable service by facilitating and helping to strengthen these relationships.

Step Five: Complete the main idea.

Remind the reader of the relevance of the information in this paragraph to the main or controlling idea of the paper. If necessary, link the next topic sentence to the information you've just covered.

Example: Ultimately, school counselors need to be given the freedom to focus on students and student needs, rather than being bogged down by endless streams of paperwork and scheduling duties. School systems cannot afford to overlook their role as community builders and listeners if they want to see a reduction in school violence.

For more information, see:

Ramage, John. D., John C. Bean, and June Johnson. *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*. 3rd ed. New York: Pearson Education, 2003.

The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Paragraph Development." The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. N.p. 2007. Web. 30 Sept. 2010.

For further information, please use the following link via Purdue OWL:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html