

LUC WRITING CENTER - HOW TO WRITE SUCCESSFUL PARAGRAPHS

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a set of related sentences that describe one clear idea. A paragraph should be a complete chunk of information that develops the paper's thesis. Successful paragraphs should be **united** and **coherent** and should also **develop** your ideas.

How are paragraphs used in a paper?

Paragraphs are used in a paper to articulate your argument. The paragraphs in your paper should be organized from general to specific information (think of an inverted triangle), beginning with your introduction paragraph, body paragraphs in the middle, and ending with your conclusion paragraph.

Successful Paragraphs:

1. Follow the TEAM method. Each paragraph should contain a:
 - T**-topic sentence/main idea (at the beginning of the paragraph)
 - E**-evidence (quotes, paraphrases, generally anything that is not your own idea)
 - A**-analysis (this is where your ideas and discussion come in)
 - M**-mix: summary and link (summing up the paragraph and possibly transitioning to the next paragraph)
2. Use Transitions: both between paragraphs (either at the end or the beginning) *and* within paragraphs to connect your ideas. See our Transition Handout for more information.
3. Build on one another. Although your body paragraphs may be talking about different themes or ideas, they should all point back to and develop your thesis *as well as* build on one another to help organize your paper. (Transitions really help with this!)

When should you start a new paragraph?

1. When changing ideas or perspectives
2. To compare and contrast ideas (the **Block Method**)
3. To give your readers a break (generally paragraphs should not be longer than one page)
4. When moving from your Introduction paragraph or to your Conclusion paragraph. These two paragraphs should be separate from the rest of your paper.

Remember: Do not be too worried about the length of your paragraphs. As long as your paragraphs have unified ideas and are coherent the size can vary.

How do you know if you have been successful?

Following the TEAM method will give you a good base. To check your essay, restate the main idea of each of your paragraphs. If your main ideas make sense and form a coherent argument then you're doing a great job! See our Reverse Outline Handout for more information.

For More Information:

- [“On Paragraphs”](#) (Purdue OWL)
- [“Paragraphs”](#) (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center)
- [“Paragraphs”](#) (Indiana University Bloomington)
- [“Paragraphing”](#) (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

LUC WRITING CENTER - HOW TO WRITE SUCCESSFUL PARAGRAPHS

Example of a Successful Paragraph:¹

We learn about Mrs. Ramsey's personality by observing her feelings about other characters. For example, Mrs. Ramsey has mixed feelings toward Mr. Tansley, but her feelings seem to grow more positive over time as she comes to know him better. At first Mrs. Ramsey finds Mr. Tansley annoying, as shown especially when he mentions that no one is going to the lighthouse (52). But rather than hating him, at this point she feels pity: "she pitied men always as if they lacked something . . ." (85). Then later, during the gathering, pity turns to empathy as she realizes that Mr. Tansley must feel inferior. He must know, Mrs. Ramsey thinks, that "no woman would look at him with Paul Rayley in the room" (106). Finally, by the end of the dinner scene, she feels some attraction to Mr. Tansley and also a new respect: "She liked his laugh. . . . She liked his awkwardness. There was a lot in that man after all" (110). In observing this evolution in her attitude, we learn more about Mrs. Ramsey than we do about Mr. Tansley. The change in Mrs. Ramsey's attitude is not used by Woolf to show that Mrs. Ramsey is fickle or confused; rather it is used to show her capacity for understanding both the frailty and complexity of human beings. This is a central characteristic of Mrs. Ramsey's personality.

Paragraph Breakdown with the TEAM Method:

Topic Sentence: We learn about Mrs. Ramsey's personality by observing her feelings about other characters.

Evidence: For example, Mrs. Ramsey has mixed feelings toward Mr. Tansley, but her feelings seem to grow more positive over time as she comes to know him better. At first Mrs. Ramsey finds Mr. Tansley annoying, as shown especially when he mentions that no one is going to the lighthouse (52). But rather than hating him, at this point she feels pity: "she pitied men always as if they lacked something . . ." (85). Then later, during the gathering, pity turns to empathy as she realizes that Mr. Tansley must feel inferior. He must know, Mrs. Ramsey thinks, that "no woman would look at him with Paul Rayley in the room" (106). Finally, by the end of the dinner scene, she feels some attraction to Mr. Tansley and also a new respect: "She liked his laugh. . . . She liked his awkwardness. There was a lot in that man after all" (110).

Analysis: In observing this evolution in her attitude, we learn more about Mrs. Ramsey than we do about Mr. Tansley. The change in Mrs. Ramsey's attitude is not used by Woolf to show that Mrs. Ramsey is fickle or confused; rather it is used to show her capacity for understanding both the frailty and complexity of human beings.

Mix: The change in Mrs. Ramsey's attitude is not used by Woolf to show that Mrs. Ramsey is fickle or confused; rather it is used to show her capacity for understanding both the frailty and complexity of human beings. This is a central characteristic of Mrs. Ramsey's personality.

LUC Writing Center Curriculum, Emily Datskou and Lydia Craig 2017 ©

¹ (adapted from [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#))