

# How to Write a Paragraph

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Paragraphs make up the academic paper. Although paragraphs should be organized in a way that presents your argument as both logical and persuasive, sentences *within* paragraphs should also be strategically organized.

Just as your paper will have 3 main parts (the introduction, body, and conclusion), your paragraph will also have 3 main parts: the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and the concluding/transitioning sentence.

## Topic Sentence

Topic sentences tell your reader what that paragraph is about. Because each paragraph should only contain 1 of your paper's main points, the topic sentence should also only be about 1 thing.

In the examples below, you would not want to mention seatbelts *and* helmets if your paragraph is only about helmets.

**Good Example:** Helmets are an essential piece of protective gear for cyclists.

**Bad Example:** Helmets are an essential piece of protective gear for cyclists, and seatbelts are an essential piece of protective gear for motorists.

## Body Sentences

These sentences support your topic sentence. Some of these statements may include quotations from scholarly sources, data, or research. All body sentences serve to support the topic sentence of the paragraph and nothing else. Relating to the helmet topic sentence from above, here is example two body sentences:

According to the most recent issue of *Cyclist Weekly*, helmets saved the lives of 74% of cyclists who crashed and landed on their heads in the year 2009. Additionally, Dr. Marvin Shapiro stated in his address to Congress that "helmets have proven time and again to be key factors in protecting the neural and cognitive functions of the brain" when cyclists have flipped their bikes (Smith 72).

## Concluding Sentences

After you have supported your topic sentence with evidence, you will now close the paragraph by restating what you covered in the paragraph. For our helmet example, a concluding sentence might look like this:

Because helmets protect the brain in the event of a wreck, they are essential to the safety of every cyclist.

You may also use the concluding sentence to transition to the topic of the next paragraph. If you are addressing the cost of helmets, a concluding/transition sentence may look like this:

Because helmets protect the brain in the event of a wreck, they are essential to the safety of every cyclist. When the relatively low cost of a helmet is considered in addition to safety, helmets become even more critical for the biker.

Notice above that the concluding sentence wrapped up the paragraph, and a new sentence transitioned to (or hinted at) the next main point: cost. Sometimes concluding and transition sentences may be one sentence, or, as in the case above, two separate sentences.

You may even decide to wait until the opening of your next paragraph to transition to the cost of helmets, thus combining your transition with your topic sentence. Take the following for an example:

In addition to the safety benefits of helmets, the relatively low cost of purchasing a helmet supports the necessity of wearing one while biking.

The example above not only ties safety benefits to cost, but also tells your reader that this next paragraph will be solely about cost, just as the preceding paragraph was solely about safety.

### **Putting It Together**

Below is the paragraph we have been formulating over the course of this handout. Obviously, more evidence is needed for a full paragraph, but the structure of a strong paragraph resembles the one below:

Helmets are an essential piece of protective gear for cyclists. According to the most recent issue of *Cyclist Weekly*, helmets saved the lives of 74% of cyclists who crashed and landed on their heads in the year 2009. Additionally, Dr. Marvin Shapiro stated in his address to Congress that “helmets have proven time and again to be key factors in protecting the neural and cognitive functions of the brain” when cyclists have flipped their bikes (Smith 72). Because helmets protect the brain in the event of a wreck, they are essential to the safety of every cyclist.

### **What Not To Do**

The following is an example of a paragraph with no clear topic sentence, little scholarly evidence, and no cohesion.

Some people wear helmets; other people wear seatbelts. My mom always made me wear a helmet and it protected my brain. If non-human animals wore helmets, they may live longer because their brains would be protected to. I think it should be illegal to ride a bike without a helmet. Helmets are like the seatbelts of bikes. My first helmet was orange.

While this example seems extreme, first drafts of papers often have paragraphs that are very similar. Read through each paragraph closely and ask, “Do all of my sentences relate to and explain/support my topic sentence?” If not, those out-of-place sentences might need to be expanded into paragraphs of their own.