WRITING A PARAGRAPH

Somewhere between the art of good writing and the science of rational argument lies the humble paragraph.

A well-written paragraph develops an argument, defines important issues and excites the reader’s attention.

When poorly composed, a paragraph is a set of loosely connected sentences each moving in a different direction leaving the reader to find the links. In essence, poor paragraphs raise questions; good ones deal with them.

Aim to write clear, unified and coherent paragraphs. If you do, your reader will be able to easily follow the development of your ideas from sentence to sentence and from one paragraph to the next.

Paragraphs are a collection of sentences. In academic texts, most paragraphs will have at least four or five sentences. Thinking about the best way to organise these sentences in your paragraph is necessary if you want to present your ideas in a coherent, unified and logical manner.

Good paragraphs have the following characteristics.

1. **Topic Sentence**: A statement of the main idea you will discuss in the paragraph.
2. **Unity**: Each sentence builds on and links to the one main idea of the paragraph.
3. **Coherence**: The main idea is developed using explanations, examples, etc. in a clear, logical and connected way.
4. **Flow**: The way you order your ideas and your use of appropriate linking words and phrases contribute to the smooth flow and development of your ideas.

Academic paragraphs are different from the paragraphs you see in newspapers, magazines and emails. If written well, the ideas in them are better organised and more fully developed. In addition, they rely to a greater extent on credible evidence to back up any claims that have been made.
Paragraph samples

1. Sport psychologists are also assisting coaches to manage talent. Doing so requires an understanding that talented people are very good at reflection (good thinkers). They also exploit their strengths through strong self-awareness, which is turned into their advantage. In addition, talented people often fail, but learn to convert setbacks into opportunities. They have an urge for personal growth, meaning and purpose in all that they do, and a general feeling of being on the move (Robertson & Abbey, 2003). Understanding and borrowing information on good-to-great levels of leadership (Collins, 2001) and [on] what (really) works and does not work in managing people in business settings (Kehoe, Baartz, & Bate, 2004; Robbins, 2003) would assist sport psychologists and sport coaches in …[managing talent].

2. Water conservation policy is a vexed issue for governments. Egan and Jones (2008, p. 26) argue that "water conservation policies must be reconsidered and reformulated". They believe that future policies should be developed by those who have played an active role in local community affairs. Their perspective is criticised by Major (2010) who asserts that government policy makers, especially those who are active in community affairs, are best placed to develop strategies which will ensure adequate water for both household and industrial use. These differing views suggest that policy formulation will remain a contentious issue for some time.


2Constructed for teaching purposes.

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