

# Paragraph Structure and Purpose

Paragraphs are used to help your reader follow the logic of your argument. They should not be too long (generally speaking, paragraphs that are longer than 3/4 of a page are probably too long). When you begin a new idea, a point that contrasts one you were just discussing, or when you are raising a related but separate point, it's probably time to start a new paragraph.

In addition to containing clear, discreet thoughts, a paragraph should serve a specific purpose. Ask yourself the following questions:

What am I trying to say in this paragraph?

Am I expanding on a point?

Am I qualifying a statement?

**Here are some suggestions for how to think about what your paragraph is doing (this list is not exhaustive!):**

*Stating:* Making an assertion.

*Supporting:* Providing evidence for an assertion.

*Concurring:* Agreeing with another author's assertion.

*Qualifying:* Restricting the meaning of an assertion already made.

*Negating:* Offering reasoning or evidence to demonstrate the falsehood of an assertion.

*Expanding:* Stating more comprehensively an idea or assertion already expressed.

*Analyzing:* Breaking an assertion down into its constituent parts in order to clarify or evaluate it.

*Describing:* Naming one or more features of an object or concept, to help the reader imagine it precisely or understand it fully.

*Comparing and contrasting:* Examining objects alongside each other for the purpose of clarifying their features, evaluating them or noting differences and similarities.

*Evaluating:* Making judgment about something discussed previously

*Synthesizing:* Combining elements of previous paragraphs into a coherent whole; often this includes presenting a new perspective on the subject.

*Summarizing:* Restating the principal idea of an argument or point already introduced.

*Transitioning:* Moving from one aspect of the argument to another by connecting the points for the reader.