

Organizing Paragraphs by Topic

Organizing paragraphs by topic progresses an argument in a clear and logical way. Organized body paragraphs are unified (discuss one topic) and coherent (flow logically from one sentence to the next). Topical structure works like a map that tells readers what to expect in a paper and how the information presented all fits together.

Body paragraphs are the main part of your writing. Generally speaking, body paragraphs should have at least three sentences. You can base each of the body paragraphs in your essay on the same structure, but you certainly do not have to. Every paragraph except those that work as an introduction or a conclusion is a body paragraph.

Each body paragraph in your essay should cover one topic or main idea. Working from an outline makes developing body paragraphs easier, or you can read over a draft and watch for shifts in topic within paragraphs or similar ideas that should be grouped together. Points in your argument or pieces of information should be presented in the same order they were presented in your introduction and thesis statement for maximum clarity.

How to Structure a Body Paragraph:

Although there is no absolute formula for writing paragraphs:

- The first sentence, or topic sentence, introduces the reader to what kind of material will be covered in that body paragraph.
- Middle sentences present evidence and make additional, detailed statements to support the main point. These sentences explain how evidence fits into your topic. In academic writing the types of evidence that support topics are facts and statistics, expert testimony, examples, personal experience/opinion, and anecdotal evidence.
- The final sentence of a body paragraph should wrap up what the paragraph has discussed and transition into the next paragraph.

Example:

Consider an essay with this thesis statement: “Plants can be considered conscious because they respond to their environment, show relationships with others that share their genetic code, and display emotional reactions.” A reader will expect the first paragraph after the introduction to discuss plants responding to their environment. After that information, evidence about plants showing relationships with their genetic “family” should be presented in a separate paragraph. The next paragraph will explain how plants display emotional reactions. These body paragraphs will be followed by a conclusion.

A Unified & Coherent Body Paragraph:

The paragraph begins with a topic sentence, supports the topic with scientific evidence and an example, and then transitions to the next paragraph:

One factor that determines consciousness is response to the environment – a quality plants definitely display. Scientists found that when a certain plant was attacked by caterpillars, it reacted by releasing a pheromone that attracts wasps, a natural predator of the caterpillars (Yong, 2007). This response shows that the plant not only perceived the threat but acted to eliminate it. A parasitic plant, the dodder weed, interacts with its environment by “stalking” its victims and gathering information about which direction to grow. The dodder weed’s behavior shows decision-making and premeditation, both building blocks of consciousness. Plants’ interaction with the environment is more than just automatic, and when genetically similar plants are in that environment, things get even more complicated.

