

## **The Importance of Paragraph Writing: An Introduction**

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**Abstract:** Writing and putting an accurate word on a paper is quite an easy task, but writing a sentence is a bit difficult. Writing a paragraph is the most difficult academic activity. It is much more required as compared to any other activity in the writing skill of any language. To know and organize a paragraph in a coherent, cohesive and united way, it means that you know and have the command on the foundation in any pyramid of academic writing. Writing a simple cover letter, an academic essay, thesis or dissertation is impossible in a case when you as a writer do not have sound and practical knowledge on paragraph writing. The length of paragraph depends on the writer. It is varied from a single sentence to a full page. Starting with a few simple sentences on a paper is not enough. Instead, you need to make it sure that your paragraph is based on good coherence, cohesion and unity. This paper is an introductory attempt to present the art of paragraph writing for the language students of Nangarhar University after they are found to be weaker in writing than other language skills.

**Keywords:** Paragraph, Writing, Nangarhar University, Characteristics.

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### **1. Introduction**

Writing dates back thousands of years. People used to write on cave walls, stones and on various other things which were used instead of paper. About 3,500 years ago, the idea of alphabet came into practice. It is also worth mentioning that there was even the concept of communication in languages when there wasn't the idea of writing. Since writing is considered to be one of the productive skills of a language. Hence, different languages use different systems of writing. At the meantime, different languages also use different writing styles. For instance, the English writing organization style is quite simple which has a beginning (introduction), a middle (body) and an end (conclusion) while the Japanese writing style is circular in which the writer doesn't want to mention the topic to his/her readers. Instead, Japanese writers tend their readers to be imaginative enough. Moreover, the Arabic writing style is repetitive, and this makes it more interesting for readers while the same repetition theory is boring if it is done in English writing. Therefore, there is always emphasis on to avoid repetition. It is also important to note that one writing style isn't better than another, just as one language isn't better than another. To be a successful writer in any language, you need to learn the writing style in addition to words and grammar rules (Boardman, 2008; Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

After observing the weakness of students' English writing skill existed in the departments of foreign languages of Nangarhar University particularly (English and Arabic), the researchers felt the need to write an introductory paper on paragraph writing, which will help the students acquire basic and essential knowledge of paragraph writing, which they later can expand it to essay and other types of academic writing. The paper covers important topics such as the organization, format and kinds of paragraph, the writing process and the characteristics of writing. The paper finally presents a conclusion and a list of recommendations.

### **2. Paragraph as a Basic Organization in Writing Skill**

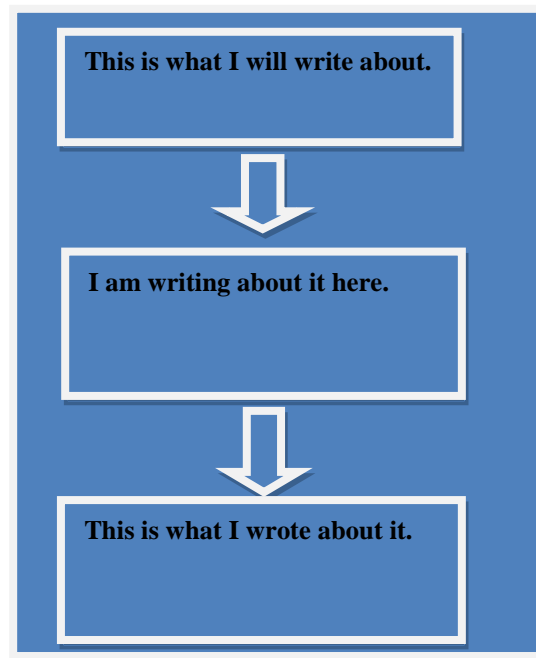
Paragraph by definition is a group of closely related sentences that develop one single idea. From the mentioned definition, it is quite clear that only one topic is being discussed in a paragraph. The discussion of more than one topic is not acceptable under one paragraph. Let's observe the below paragraph.

"The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi shocked all Indians in every corner of India. Gandhi was a small man, and he was vegetarian. He lived a very simple life. The minorities lost a man who always stood up for them; the poor lost the only person who was working towards real equality. Even his enemies felt a great loss in his death because he never hated anyone, big or small" (Champa & Sasikumar, 2010, pp.2-3).

While reading the above paragraph carefully, you will find out that two sentences do not form the essential part of it. They are irrelevant. The topic sentence, which is the main idea of the above paragraph, is: Gandhi's assassination shocked everyone, but sentences no. 2 and 3 *Gandhi was a small man, and he was vegetarian. He lived a very simple life* are irrelevant sentences which have to be omitted.

## 2.1. The organization of a Paragraph

As discussed earlier that the English writing organization style is quite simple, which has a beginning, middle and an end. Moreover, the beginning should say that what the article is going to be about, the middle should talk about the topic of the article, and the end should say what the article was about. For the better understanding, here is a diagram of English style organization (Boardman, 2008).



**Figure 1:** English Writing Organization Style adopted from Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008

In addition, paragraph is the basic unit of academic writing in English. Students who want to study in a college or university need to learn how to write a paragraph because all other types of academic writing such as essays, reports, compositions, and research papers are based on paragraph. Academic paragraph have a very specific organizational pattern. When you follow this pattern, your paragraph will be easy for your readers to understand. This simple pattern is based on topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. Let's discuss each one of them briefly (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

## 2.2. The Topic Sentence

A sentence that introduces the topic of a paragraph to the reader is called topic sentence. It is also notable that the main idea is also stated in the topic sentence. Topic sentence is composed of two parts, which are topic and controlling idea. The topic is a word or a phrase, which introduces what the entire paragraph is going to be about and the controlling idea, is the writer's opinion about the topic. Controlling idea is further required to limit a topic (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008). Let's study the below example.

Example: The University of Georgia is the first public chartered university in the state of Georgia, USA.

In the above topic sentence, *The University of Georgia* is the topic and the *(is the first public chartered university in the state of Georgia, USA)* is controlling idea, which is also the write's opinion about the topic University of Georgia.

### 2.2.1. What is a good Topic Sentence?

A good topic sentence must have the following three characteristics. Using one of these three features will enable writer to develop his or her paragraph. Otherwise, it is a fact, you as a writer cannot write more on fact (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

- Use descriptive adjective before noun.
- Use several and many.
- Use numbers.

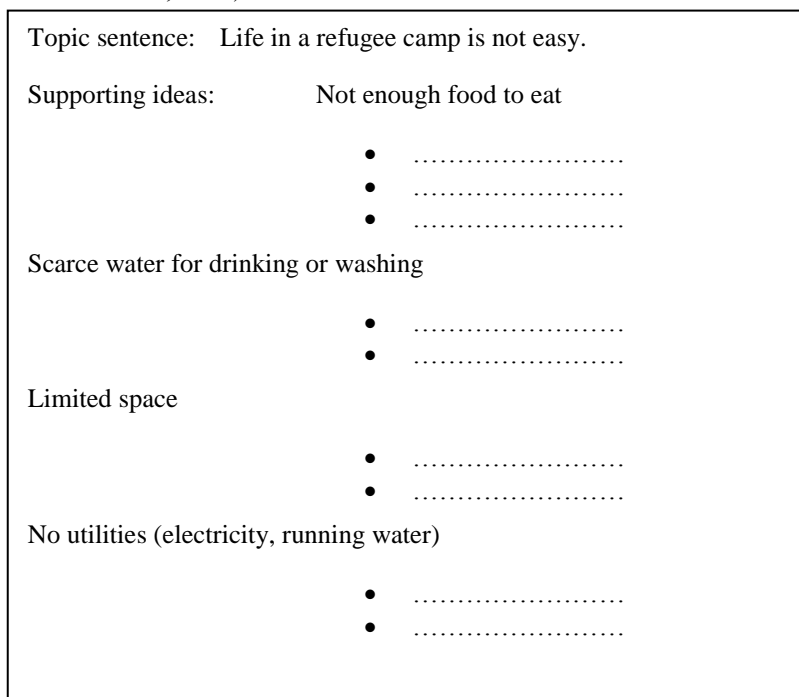
Examples:

- a. Nangarhar University is a source for higher education.
- b. Nangarhar University is an outstanding source of higher education.
- c. Nangarhar University has several departments.
- d. Nangarhar University has over four hundred faculty members.

In the above example (a), it is a fact, and it is very difficult to write a paragraph on fact. But example (b), which has a descriptive adjective “outstanding” before noun can motivate the readers to read the rest of the paragraph and most important is that it will enable writer to develop his/her writing. Examples (c&d) are also good topic sentences because several and number are used.

### 2.3. The Body (Supporting Sentences)

The sentences that build up the body of your paragraph are called the supporting sentences. Supporting sentences are used to support the topic sentence of your paragraph. It is supporting sentences by which you can provide logics and evidences through which you can convince your readers or at least convey your own message to the audience. There are two types of supporting sentences which are major and minor supporting sentences. Major supporting sentences directly support the topic sentence in a paragraph while minor supporting sentences directly support the major supporting sentences and indirectly support the topic sentence. Let’s observe the below modal outline (O’Donnell & Judith, 1993).



**Figure 2:** Identifying the Major and Minor Supporting Sentences adopted from O’Donnell & Judith, 1993, pp.7-9)

In the above figure, the topic sentence is written right at the beginning. There are major supporting details to directly support the topic sentence. Under each of the major supporting sentence, we can write other minor supporting sentences. The number of minor supporting sentences depends on writer how enough and best s/he can elaborate the topic. There might be at least one minor supporting sentence or more.

### 2.4. The Concluding Sentence

The concluding sentence of a paragraph is generally needed in a stand-alone paragraph. Usually a concluding sentence is the restatement of the topic sentence which is named as the restatement concluding sentence. That is, it gives the same information as the topic sentence, but the information is expressed in a different way. Besides restatement concluding sentence, there is another type of concluding sentence that is summary concluding sentence. Such type of concluding sentence summarizes all major supporting sentences and presented as a concluding sentence. Concluding sentence usually starts with a transition such as in short, all in all, in conclusion, in summary. Not all concluding sentences require a transition. You as writer decide if it is

needed (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008). Let's read and observe the different parts of a paragraph in the below figure.

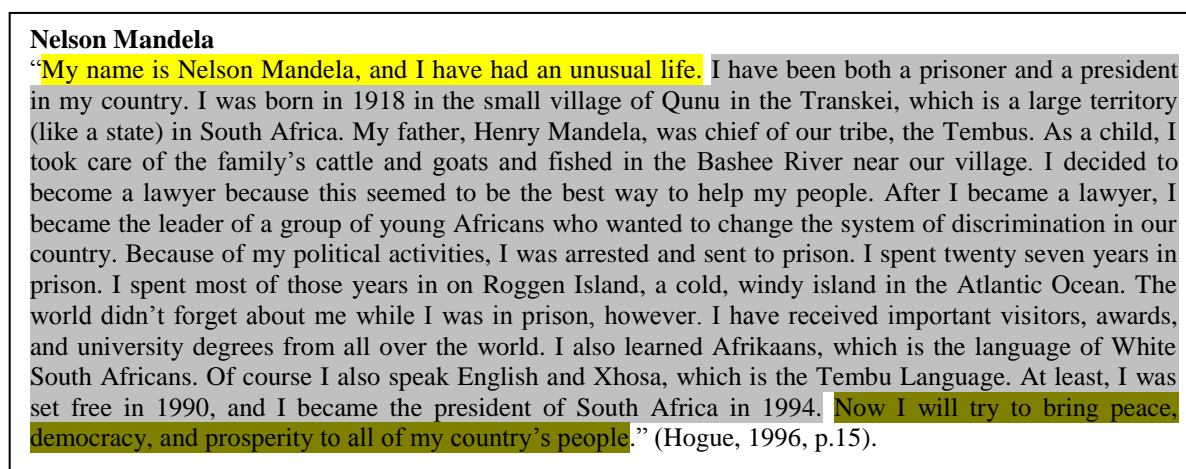


Figure 3: Model Paragraph adopted from Hogue, 1996, p.15

## 2.5. The Format of Paragraph

In English language, it is compulsory to know the format of paragraph. A paragraph which is based on correct format is considered a great work of professionalism in writing skills. There are certain numbers of rules which have to be followed while writing a standard paragraph in the term of format (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

1. Put your name and date in the upper right hand corner.
2. Center the title above your paragraph.
3. Indent the first sentence of your paragraph.
4. Start each sentence with a capital letter.
5. End each sentence with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark.
6. Begin each sentence where the previous sentence ends.
7. Write on every other line. This is called double-spacing.
8. Put margins of about one inch on each side of the paper.

## 2.6. Kinds of Paragraph

There seems to be different kinds of paragraph, but here we are going to focus on three basic types of paragraph, which are Narrative Paragraph, Descriptive Paragraph, and Expository Paragraph. Let's discuss each one of them briefly (Amiri, 2008).

### 2.6.1. Narrative Paragraph

To tell a story in its simplest form is called narrative paragraph. This type of writing is mostly talking about the events that happened in the past. It has the same organization as other paragraphs have (Topic Sentence, Supporting Sentences and Concluding Sentence). Writing any types of paragraph needs to know and use specific transitions. Here for narrative paragraph, we have specific transitions by which we give chronological order to the supporting sentences in the body of paragraph. These transitions are briefly stated below. It is also notable that every transition has to follow a comma (Boardman, 2008).  
Transitions of Time Order: *First, at first, second, third, next, then, after that, finally.*

### 2.6.2. Descriptive Paragraph

When you write a descriptive paragraph, you are trying to communicate picture or feeling in words. You might want to tell your reader how something looks, or how it sounds, smells, feels, or tastes. If you say that the new film actress is very beautiful, your audience's next question will almost be what does she look like? (Amiri, 2008). In addition, the purpose of descriptive paragraph is to paint a vivid picture in reader's mind. The reader should be able to see the picture that you are describing in his or her mind.

### 2.6.3. Preposition of Place in Descriptive Paragraph

Since it is you as writer's job to paint a vivid picture in readers' mind, to do this, you need to use space order. In other words, you describe a person from top to bottom or from bottom to top. Once the direction you

started from one angle, it is not changeable in the middle. Preposition of place plays a vital role in developing the space order in descriptive paragraph. Common prepositions of place are: *above, around, behind, below, between, in, in front of, next to, on, under* (Boardman, 2008).

#### **2.6.4. Expository Paragraph**

In this kind of paragraph, you as a writer explain something. There are different ways by which you can explain something; one common way of this is by giving examples (i.e. for example, for instance and so on). As space order is important in descriptive paragraph, logical order is equally important in expository paragraph. Being a writer, you decide and give your own order to the major supporting sentences, because the logics are different from one person to the other. Transitions that can help us in giving logical order to ideas are: *first, first of all, second, third, next, finally*.... (Boardman, 2008).

### **2.7. Writing Processes**

Anything which is based on a clear process is easy and understandable. The same is paragraph. The writing process which is discussed here is not only used for paragraph, but it is also usable for any length of writing such as essay... the process of writing is described and put forward in different forms, but the main concept is the same. Here we are going to discuss one of them (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

- a. Understanding the Assignment
- b. Brainstorming
- c. Organizing Your Ideas
- d. Writing the First Draft
- e. Rewriting the First Draft
- f. Writing the Next or Final Draft

#### **2.7.1. Understanding the Assignment**

In this step of writing, it is required to answer some of the important questions such as (what is the topic? why am I writing? where do I get the information? how long is the paper? when is due? how do I resent it?) (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

#### **2.7.2. Brainstorming**

To brainstorm means to write down all the ideas. No matter if the ideas are good or bad, relevant or irrelevant. In this step they are equal. There is another step in which we can evaluate ideas. Moreover, there are three different forms of brainstorming such as using a mind map, using columns, and free-writing (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

#### **2.7.3. Organizing Your Ideas**

In this stage of writing, it is important to make sure that:

- You write a topic sentence
- You eliminate irrelevant ideas
- You make an outline and add relevant ideas

#### **2.7.4. Writing the First Draft**

In this step of writing, you are ready to put your ideas in a good paragraph form. This draft is just for you. Don't worry about grammar and punctuation because there is another step where you can revise and edit this draft (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

#### **2.7.5. Rewriting the First Draft**

In this step, two things are very important that you should consider, which are revising and editing. When you revise, you should look for the unity, coherence, and cohesion of paragraph, in addition to this, you should ensure that there are enough major and minor supporting sentences. In editing, you must pay attention to grammar, spelling, word forms and punctuation (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

#### **2.7.6. Writing the Final Draft**

"This step of writing process is a clean version of your writing. Here you carried all the editing and revision out. Since this is the final version. Thus, it is important that a good paragraph format should be used and submitted" (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008, p.40).

**2.8. Characteristics of Writing**

Coherence, cohesion and unity are considered the characteristic features of good writing. Thus, one should follow the mentioned characteristics to write in a more coherent, cohesive and united way. It will further help the readers to follow the logical sequence of the written text (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

**2.8.1. Coherence**

When all the supporting sentences are in good order, it means the paragraph is based on coherence. The principles for ordering depend on the types of paragraph. As a first example, the coherence for descriptive paragraph is based on space order. Prepositions of place (in, on, above, behind, beside, under, etc.) help us implement space order. Second, the coherence for narrative paragraph is based on time order. Transitions related to time help us bring coherence to narrative paragraph. As a final example, coherence for expository paragraph is based on logical order, and the transitions of example and logical order help us carry out coherence for expository paragraph (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008). To know more on various transitions for coherence, look at the below chart:

**Table 1:** Transitions for Coherence adopted from Boardman

Time Order	Logical Order	Example	Addition	Contrast	Result	Conclusion
First	First	For example	Also	However	As a consequence	All in all
At first	First of all	For instance	In addition	In contrast	As a result	In conclusion
Second	Second	As a (first, second, final) example	Moreover		Consequently	In short
Third	Third		Furthermore		Therefore	In summary
Next	Next					To sum up
Then	Finally					
After that						
Finally						

**2.8.2. Cohesion**

Another important characteristic of good paragraph is cohesion. When a paragraph has cohesion, all the supporting sentences connect to each other in their support of the topic sentence. The methods of connecting sentences to each other are called cohesive devices. Four important cohesive devices are connectors (i.e. however, etc), definite article (the), personal pronouns (i.e. he, him, his, etc), and demonstrative pronouns (i.e. this, those, etc) (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008, p.23).

**2.8.3. Unity**

The last characteristic of good paragraph writing is the unity. When all the supporting sentences are related to the topic sentence, in this case the paragraph has unity. If a paragraph has a sentence, which is not related to the topic sentence, it is irrelevant sentence and it has to be omitted (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008).

**3. Conclusion**

In order to enhance English writing skills of students of Nangarhar University particularly the Departments of English and Arabic, an attempt was made to discuss paragraph that is considered the foundation for any other type of academic writing (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2008). Once, the skill of paragraph writing is mastered; then, it is quite easy to extend it into essay, etc. In this article, an attempt was made to introduce paragraph from various angles such as the definition, the parts by which a paragraph is organized, the format of paragraph, the basic kinds of paragraph, the writing process and the characteristics of good writing, so this precise and concise piece of information will help the students develop their paragraph writing skills specifically in English language.

**4. Recommendations**

1. Developing paragraph writing skill is highly significant to students of any major. Hence, they will submit their school and college assignments in a standard way.
2. To know and write a well-organized paragraph will help students develop other forms of writing such as essays, letters etc.

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