

Paragraph Structure

Generally, the most effective way to structure an academic paragraph is to keep the main point manageable and clearly in focus. A good way to do this is to begin and end by summarizing the main point of the paragraph.

A paragraph's general structure should include these elements:

- Topic sentence – summarize the main point of the paragraph
- Include supporting detail
- Analyze the detail
- Concluding sentence – recap the main point

• The Paragraph Sandwich •

- The first sentence of a paragraph is often called the topic sentence.
 - Summarize the main point of the paragraph
 - Relate this point to the thesis, or main point of the whole piece
- The final sentence is a concluding sentence.
 - Echo the topic sentence, reiterating the main idea

When both of these mention the main point of the paragraph, they create a “paragraph sandwich” that keeps the main idea in focus.

In between these elements will be the meat of your paragraph: the detailed information.

• Meat of the Paragraph •

In between your first and final sentences, include supporting detail that explains and proves your main point. Following each supporting detail, be sure to use your own words to analyze the information and relate it back to your main point.

- One paragraph should focus on one idea, stated explicitly.

Don't include extraneous details—only focus on one main point and use subpoints or details to support it.

- Cover each subpoint or detail individually and develop it fully.

Discussing your subpoints or supporting details haphazardly will result in a paragraph that feels disjointed or unorganized. Talk about one detail at a time and cover it fully before moving on to the next one.

Give your reader the information (supporting detail), usually in the form of a cited reference from another source.

Following this, relate it back to your main point with a sentence of your own (analysis).

EXAMPLE: (using APA 7 for the citations and references)

[TOPIC SENTENCE] Since televisions became a staple in nearly every household, parents have been warning their children that sitting too close to the screen would damage their eyes, but this decades-old warning is actually unfounded. **[EVIDENCE]** Dr. Saffra states that when TVs were still new and imperfect technology, TVs had higher radiation than modern screens, and this radiation may have been damaging; but these days, screens are well-shielded and harmless to eyes (O'Connor, 2005). **[ANALYSIS]** Although the well-known warning to keep some distance between oneself and the TV was appropriate in the past, 21st century technology renders it as obsolete as the 1950s TVs that originated it. Ophthalmologists of the 21st century agree that the lights of screens—TVs, computers, and phones alike—can cause eyestrain, but no lasting damage. **[EVIDENCE]** Not only this, but Dr. Salvin attests that children “can actually focus up close without eyestrain better than adults,” but that children grow out of the habit of sitting close to the screen (“Vision,” 2016). **[ANALYSIS]** This suggests that sitting close to the TV is less harmful for children than for older viewers, making the warning even less warranted. **[CONCLUDING SENTENCE]** Although sitting too close to a screen may alert parents to other vision problems like nearsightedness, the light itself will not cause damage their children’s eyes, making the old warning to move away from the TV no longer relevant.

References

- O'Connor, A. (2005). The claim: Sitting too close to the TV is bad for your eyes. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/07/health/the-claim-sitting-too-close-to-the-tv-is-bad-for-your-eyes.html>
- Vision Facts and Myths. (2016). KidsHealth. <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/vision-facts-myths.html>