

Another Brick in the Wall

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Paragraphs

Think of writing as a series of interlocking bricks. Each paragraph within a document is a brick, but so is each sentence within a paragraph. In good writing, everything interlocks. This is called **flow**. Each sentence leads to the next sentence and each paragraph leads to the next paragraph.

There are six main types of paragraphs. Your purpose determines which type you use:

General to Specific

- Begins with a topic sentence and provides specific supporting details.
- This is the most common form, since it gives your reader the most important information first and allows a reader to easily see the connection between the claim and the evidence.

Example: Bob is a bad guy. He stole Sally's heart medication and sold it on the black market for drugs, pushed Mike down the stairs and stole my bicycle then tried to sell it back to me.

Specific to General

- Prepares an audience for an idea then makes its main point at the end.
- Use this form to build up to a point.

Example: Last week, Bob stole Sally's heart medication and sold it on the black market for drugs, pushed Mike down the stairs and stole my bicycle, then tried to sell it back to me. For all these reasons, I won't go on another date with him.

Narration

- Narrates an anecdote, then provides context for why the anecdote is being used.
- Can add a personal touch, put a human face to an abstract issue or provide a 'frame' for a discussion.

Example: Imagine walking out of your apartment to find your beloved bicycle gone. You loved that bicycle! You'd even named it Old Faithful. It still had the Nirvana bumper sticker you put on in eighth grade when you went through that grunge phase. The next day, you see Bob riding around on your bicycle.

"Nice bike, eh?" he asks. "I'll sell it to you for \$100."

Do you now understand why Bob isn't allowed over for dinner?

Comparison

- Helps the reader to see similarities more readily.
- If ideas are complex, using a comparison in the form of a simile may help. This may give your reader a frame of reference.

Example: Bob is like a raccoon. At first you think, ‘Oh, what a cuddly little guy. He looks so innocent.’ When you show him a little affection, however, the claws and fangs come out and he rips you to shreds.

Cause and Effect

- Used to explain procedures or to show the direct result of something.

Example: To make a temporary repair of a cracked window, purchase a windshield repair kit. Fill the eyedropper with solvent, and drop the liquid into the crack to clean it. Then, apply some tape to the backside of the glass, so that the filler glue doesn’t flow out. This will also give your window structure. Last, carefully paint the filler over the crack and let it dry. After it’s dry, peel off the tape. Your window will last until it can be repaired. OR! You could just not invite Bob over, so he won’t break your window.

Transition

- Provides a link from one idea to the next.

Example: It’s clear that Bob has harmed me, but what’s worse is what he did to my friend Sue.

How do I know when my paragraph is done?

The number one question to ask yourself is: have I made a point? If you have, it’s time to go on to the next paragraph. You can also take into account the style of the writing you’re doing. Long paragraphs create a more serious tone and allow you to more fully develop a thought, but short paragraphs are more inviting to the reader.

I tried your forms, but my writing still doesn’t seem very flow-y. What should I do?

Easy! Think of the metaphor of the bricks in the wall. Each sentence must logically follow the other. One way to do this is to put old information (or information your reader already knows) first and end with information that is newer or more complex. You can also use transitional words like: also, again, next, therefore, etc. Finally, remember to vary your sentence rhythm. If all your sentences sound the same, your writing will seem choppy.