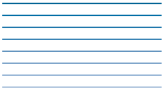


Organising paragraphs



Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of academic writing. Well-structured paragraphs help the reader understand the topic more easily by dividing up the argument into convenient sections. This unit looks at:

- the components of paragraphs
- the way the components are linked together
- the linkage between paragraphs in the overall text

1 Paragraph structure

■ Discuss the following questions.

- What is a paragraph?
- What is the normal length of a paragraph?
- Is there a standard structure for paragraphs?
- How is a paragraph linked together?

2 Example paragraph

- Study the paragraph below. It is from the introduction to an essay titled

‘Should home ownership be encouraged?’

2.1

The rate of home ownership varies widely across the developed world.

Germany, for instance, has one of the lowest rates, at 42 per cent, while in Spain it is twice as high, 85 per cent. Both the USA and Britain have similar rates of about 69 per cent. The reasons for this variation appear to be more cultural and historic than economic, since high rates are found in both rich and poorer countries. There appears to be no conclusive link between national prosperity and the number of homeowners.

This paragraph can be analysed:

1 Topic sentence	The rate of home ownership varies widely across the developed world.
2 Example 1	Germany, for instance , has one of the lowest rates, at 42 per cent, while in Spain it is twice as high, 85 per cent.
3 Example 2	Both the USA and Britain have similar rates of about 69 per cent.
4 Reason	The reasons for this variation appear to be more cultural and historic than economic, since high rates are found in both rich and poorer countries.
5 Summary	There appears to be no conclusive link between national prosperity and the number of homeowners.

This example shows that:

- A paragraph is a group of sentences that deal with a single topic.
- The length of paragraphs varies significantly according to text type, but should be no less than four or five sentences.
- Normally (but not always) the first sentence introduces the topic. Other sentences may give definitions, examples, information, reasons, restatements and summaries.



- (d) The parts of the paragraph are linked together by the phrases and conjunctions shown in bold in the table. They guide the reader through the arguments presented.

3 Practice A

- Read the next paragraph from the same essay and answer the questions below.

3.1

Despite this, many countries encourage the growth of home ownership. Ireland and Spain, for example, allow mortgage payers to offset payments against income tax. It is widely believed that owning your own home has social as well as economic benefits. Compared to renters, homeowners are thought to be more stable members of the community who contribute more to local affairs. In addition, neighbourhoods of owner occupiers are considered to have less crime and better schools. But above all, ownership encourages saving and allows families to build wealth.

- (a) Analyse the paragraph by completing the left hand column in the table below with the following types of sentence:
Supporting point 1, Supporting point 2, Supporting point 3,
Example, Reason, Topic.

	Despite this, many countries encourage the growth of home ownership.
	Ireland and Spain, for example, allow mortgage payers to offset payments against income tax.
	It is widely believed that owning your own home has social as well as economic benefits.
<i>Supporting point 1</i>	Compared to renters, homeowners are thought to be more stable members of the community who contribute more to local affairs.
	In addition, neighbourhoods of owner occupiers are considered to have less crime and better schools.
	But above all, ownership encourages saving and allows families to build wealth.

- (b) Underline the words and phrases used to link the sentences together.
- (c) Which phrase is used to link this paragraph to the one before?

4 Development of ideas

■ (a) The sentences below form the third paragraph of the same essay, but they have been mixed up. Use the table below to put them in the correct order.

- (i) These had been developed to allow higher-risk poorer families to buy their own homes, but contributed to a property price bubble.
- (ii) Many economists now argue that there is a maximum level of home ownership that should not be exceeded.
- (iii) All these claims were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American sub-prime mortgages.
- (iv) Even households that had positive equity still felt poorer and reduced their spending.
- (v) Others were trapped in their houses by negative equity, in other words their houses were worth less than they had paid for them.
- (vi) When this burst, millions of people lost their homes, which for many had contained their savings.

Topic sentence	<i>All these claims were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American sub-prime mortgages.</i>
Definition	
Result 1	
Result 2	
Result 3	
Conclusion	

- (b) Underline the phrase used to link the paragraph to the previous one.
- (c) Underline the words and phrases used to link the paragraph together.

5 Linking paragraphs together

In the examples above, each new paragraph begins with a phrase that links it to the previous paragraph, in order to maintain continuity of argument:

Despite this (i.e. the lack of a conclusive link)

All these claims (i.e. arguments in favour of home ownership)

In order to begin a new topic you may use:

Turning to the issue of . . .

Rates of infection must also be examined . . .

. . . is another area for consideration

Paragraphs can also be introduced with adverbs:

Traditionally, few examples were . . .

Finally, the performance of . . .

6 Practice B

- (a) Use the notes below and the table on p. 82 to complete a paragraph of an essay titled:

‘High rates of home ownership are bad for the economy – Discuss.’

- It is claimed that increases in rate of home ownership lead to unemployment
- Home ownership appears to make people more reluctant to move to find work
- e.g. Spain (high ownership + high unemployment) vs. Switzerland (low ownership + low unemployment)
- Other factors have been proposed, e.g. liquidity of housing markets (how easy to sell houses)
- Theory still controversial

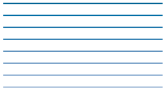
1 Topic	<i>It has been argued that rises in the rate of home ownership can increase the rate of unemployment.</i>
2 Reason	
3 Example	
4 Argument	
5 Conclusion	

■ (b) Use the notes below to write the next paragraph of the essay, including a phrase linking it to the previous paragraph.

- Recession of 2008–9 gave support to theory in some US states (e.g. California, Michigan and Florida)
- They had major housing boom in 1990s
- After recession rate of house moving fell sharply
- One factor was number of households in negative equity
- Having negative equity means selling house at loss
- High rates of ownership may deepen recession if labour is more static

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

Introductions and conclusions



An effective introduction explains the purpose and scope of the paper to the reader. The conclusion should provide a clear answer to any question asked in the title, as well as summarising the main points. In coursework both introductions and conclusions are normally written after the main body.

1 Introduction contents

Introductions are usually no more than about 10 per cent of the total length of the assignment. Therefore in a 2,000 word essay the introduction would be about 200 words.

- (a) What is normally found in an essay introduction? Choose from the list below.

	Y/N
(i) A definition of any unfamiliar terms in the title.	
(ii) Your opinions on the subject of the essay.	
(iii) Mention of some sources you have read on the topic.	
(iv) A provocative idea or question to interest the reader.	
(v) Your aim or purpose in writing.	
(vi) The method you adopt to answer the question (or an outline).	
(vii) Some brief background to the topic.	
(viii) Any limitations you set yourself.	

■ (b) Read the extracts below from introductions to articles and decide which of the functions listed above (i – viii) they are examples of.

- (i) In the past 20 years the ability of juries to assess complex or lengthy cases has been widely debated.
- (ii) The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The second section explains why corporate governance is important for economic prosperity. The third section presents the model specification and describes the data and variables used in our empirical analysis. The fourth section reports and discusses the empirical results. The fifth section concludes.
- (iii) The purpose of this paper is to investigate changes in the incidence of extreme warm and cold temperatures over the globe since 1870.
- (iv) There is no clear empirical evidence sustaining a ‘managerial myopia’ argument. Pugh *et al.* (1992) find evidence that supports such theory, but Meulbrook *et al.* (1990), Mahoney *et al.* (1997), Garvey and Hanka (1999) and a study by the Office of the Chief Economist of the Securities and Exchange Commission (1985) find no evidence.
- (v) ‘Social cohesion’ is usually defined in reference to common aims and objectives, social order, social solidarity and the sense of place attachment.
- (vi) This study will focus on mergers in the media business between 1990 and 2005, since with more recent examples an accurate assessment of the consequences cannot yet be made.

2 Introduction structure

Not every introduction will include all the elements listed above.

■ Which are essential and which are optional?

There is no standard pattern for an introduction, since much depends on the type of research you are conducting and the length of your work, but a common framework is:

a	Definition of key terms, if needed.
b	Relevant background information.
c	Review of work by other writers on the topic.
d	Purpose or aim of the paper.
e	Your methods and the results you found.
f	Any limitations you imposed.
g	The organisation of your work.

■ **Study the extracts below from the introduction to an essay titled:**

‘Evaluate the experience of e-learning for students in higher education.’

- (a) Certain words or phrases in the title may need clarifying because they are not widely understood:

There are a range of definitions of this term, but in this paper ‘e-learning’ refers to any type of learning situation where content is delivered via the internet.

▶ **See Unit 2.5 Definitions**

- (b) It is useful to remind the reader of the wider context of your work. This may also show the value of the study you have carried out:

Learning is one of the most vital components of the contemporary knowledge-based economy. With the development of computing power and technology the internet has become an essential medium for knowledge transfer.

- (c) While a longer article may have a separate literature review, in a shorter essay it is still important to show familiarity with researchers who have studied this topic previously. This may also reveal a gap in research that justifies your work:

Various researchers (Webb and Kirstin, 2003; Honig *et al.*, 2006) have evaluated e-learning in a healthcare and business context, but little attention so far has been paid to the reactions of students in higher education to this method of teaching.

- (d) The aim of your research must be clearly stated so the reader knows what you are trying to do:

The purpose of this study was to examine students' experience of e-learning in a higher education context.

- (e) The method demonstrates the process that you undertook to achieve the aim given before:

A range of studies was first reviewed, and then a survey of 200 students from a variety of disciplines was conducted to assess their experience of e-learning.

- (f) You cannot deal with every aspect of this topic in an essay, so you must make clear the boundaries of your study:

Clearly a study of this type is inevitably restricted by various constraints, notably the size of the student sample, and this was limited to students of Pharmacy and Agriculture.

- (g) Understanding the structure of your work will help the reader to follow your argument:

The paper is structured as follows. The first section presents an analysis of the relevant research, focusing on the current limited knowledge regarding the student experience. The second part . . .

3 Opening sentences

It can be difficult to start writing an essay, but especially in exams, hesitation will waste valuable time. The first few sentences should be general but not vague, to help the reader focus on the topic. They often have the following pattern:

Time phrase	Topic	Development
Currently,	the control of water resources	has emerged as potential cause of international friction.
Since 2008	electric vehicles	have become a serious commercial proposition.

It is important to avoid opening sentences that are over-general. Compare:

Nowadays there is a lot of competition among different providers of news.

Newspapers are currently facing strong competition from rival news providers such as the internet and television.

■ **Write introductory sentences for three of the following titles.**

(a) How important is it for companies to have women as senior managers?

(b) Are there any technological solutions to global warming?

(c) What can be done to reduce infant mortality in developing countries?

(d) Compare the urbanisation process in two contrasting countries.

▶ See Unit 2.7 Generalisations

4 Practice A

■ **You have to write an essay with the title**

‘Can everyone benefit from higher education?’

■ **Use the notes below to write the introduction in about 150 words (it is not necessary to refer to sources in this exercise).**

Definition: Higher education (HE) = university education

Background: Increasing demand for HE worldwide puts pressure on national budgets > many states seek to shift costs to students. In most countries degree = key to better jobs and opportunities

Purpose: To decide if access to HE should be restricted or open to all, given costs involved

Method/Outline: Discussion of following points:

HE is expensive, so who will pay?

Increasing numbers = lower quality

Is it fair for all taxpayers to support students who will earn high salaries?

How to keep HE open to clever students from poor backgrounds?

Limitations: The use of your own country as an example

5 Conclusions

Conclusions tend to be shorter and more diverse than introductions. Some articles may have a ‘summary’ or ‘concluding remarks’. But student papers should generally have a final section that summarises the arguments and makes it clear to the reader that the original question has been answered.

■ Which of the following are generally acceptable in conclusions?

- (a) A statement showing how your aim has been achieved.
- (b) A discussion of the implications of your research.
- (c) Some new information on the topic not mentioned before.
- (d) A short review of the main points of your study.
- (e) Some suggestions for further research.
- (f) The limitations of your study.
- (g) Comparison with the results of similar studies.
- (h) A quotation that appears to sum up your work.

- **Match the extracts from conclusions below with the acceptable components above.**

Example: a = vi

- (i) As always, this investigation has a number of limitations to be considered in evaluating its findings.
- (ii) These results suggest that the risk of flooding on this coast has increased significantly and is likely to worsen.
- (iii) Another line of research worth pursuing further is to study the importance of language for successful expatriate assignments.
- (iv) Our review of 13 studies of strikes in public transport demonstrates that the effect of a strike on public transport ridership varies and may either be temporary or permanent.
- (v) These results of the Colombia study reported here are consistent with other similar studies conducted in other countries (Baron and Norman, 1992).
- (vi) This study has clearly illustrated the drawbacks to family ownership of retail businesses.

6 Practice B

- **Look at Unit 1.10 Organising paragraphs, section 6. Study the notes for the first two paragraphs, then write a concluding paragraph that summarises the main points and answers the question in the title (i.e. Are high rates of home ownership bad for the economy?). Discuss any implications that arise and suggest possible further research.**