

Paragraph Structure

Thesis Statement (TS)

The job of your TS is to introduce your reader to the argument presented in the paragraph that follows. It should **NOT** contain facts, but explain why the reader should care about what is to follow. It is strictly limited to **one sentence**. It's usually the first sentence, but as you improve your stylistic writing you'll be able to try other forms.

“How do I effectively communicate the argument I’m trying to make?”

Your main goal is to convey a clear argument

1 Paragraph = 1 Idea fully explored

Development Statement (DS)

The job of the 2nd (sometimes 2nd & 3rd) sentence in any paragraph is to expand on the logic behind your argument. As the name suggests, it's where you dig into the detail and nuance of the argument. Remember the paragraph structure: “State, Relate, Prove” – the DS is the ‘relate’ component.

A Paragraph about Writing Paragraphs

(It does exactly what it says on the tin!)

The most important thing about a paragraph is that its *Thesis Statement* makes a clear argument. Ideally, the *Development Statement* will show how this argument will support the other themes of the essay and will link to the preceding and following paragraphs. It could be considered like the leg of a stool; not enough on its own to make stool stable, but an absolutely indispensable tool to achieve stability. But the argument presented will only be as strong as the evidence used to support it. This data/evidence takes multiple forms, both qualitative and/or quantitative. Sometime a quotation will be effective. Think of Paul Auster who wrote, “For me, a paragraph in a novel is a bit like a line in a poem. It has its own shape, its own music, its own integrity” (but you can cite a Key Thinker). Similarly, according to Jerome Devitt’s very reliable handout, in 83.25% of paragraphs a statistic can be used to give real punch to your argument. You may want to refer to an article that you read in the “*Made Up Times*”, or a report from the government of Fredonia, or an NGO. **I have always found it effective when Pol-Soc students use an “I” sentence to ensure that they’re offering a personal perspective on the issue at hand. A strong way to conclude a paragraph is to return to the core idea of the paragraph, namely to show how it makes a clear argument.**

TS

DS

Evidence

Your “I” Sentence

Conclusion or Link

It can be very effective to include **ONE shot, snappy sentence** to break up the monotony of having every sentence the same length...

For your supporting evidence think of the **RENNIS** system: (Reasons, Examples, Names, Numbers, Senses)

How long is a Paragraph?

There’s no specific set length to a paragraph. The general rule in a discursive essay is that it should be **around 2/3-3/4 of a copy page** (with normal size hand writing).

Why is this? Well if it’s less than ½ a page, chances are that it will **feel under-developed**. If it’s longer than a page, chances are that your argument has gotten **out of hand** and that you’ll move away from the core issues in the question.

That said, there are times when a short, punchy paragraph can be very effective... But for the moment, let’s try and master one thing, before getting ahead of ourselves!

How much DATA should I have?

Erm... How long is a piece of string?

There can’t be a definitive answer to this, because different kinds of paragraph require different amounts of supporting data! If you’re talking about something **qualitative**, like an abstract concept, a quotation will be most effective. If you’re talking about anything **quantitative**, the reader will be expecting to see at least 1 or 2 statistics. You’ll know it when you see it!

For the moment, think of **Data** as you’d use it in a paragraph as being defined as the following:

“Data is information that’s sourced and evaluated”

You don’t have to go mad with source and evaluation info, but show the reader you **can** do it.

A Paragraph never stands alone

Have you ever poked somebody in the arm with your finger? Sure, it’s annoying, but is it effective? No...

Now, consider how much more powerful that index finger is when it’s combined with all the other fingers, and your thumb, and your knuckles... Suddenly, it’s a fist, and has the power to achieve something far more potent.

That’s what a paragraph is - it’s one argument that amplifies other ideas (and is in turn amplified itself by those other paragraphs). So, the evidence should flow logically **within** a paragraph, just as the paragraphs should flow **throughout** the essay...