Writing Effective Paragraphs

You know your paper needs an introduction and a conclusion, but what about all the stuff that comes in between? In order to write a successful essay, you need effective paragraphs in the body of your essay. Effective paragraphs organize your argument and provide evidence for your claims. The basic parts of a paragraph include a topic sentence, a concluding sentence, and evidence/discussion.

# Writing Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences

A good topic sentence anchors the paragraph within your argument. The topic sentence introduces the idea you will discuss in the following paragraph and usually illustrates the paragraph’s relationship to your thesis statement (your overall argument). It serves as both a transition from the previous paragraph and as summary of the following paragraph.

**Poor Topic Sentence**: There is another reason people should become vegetarians.

**Better Topic Sentence**: Not only does vegetarianism have a positive impact on individual health, but it also benefits the environment by reducing water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

The better topic sentence above simultaneously transitions between the previous paragraph, which the reader can assume is about the health benefits of a vegetarian lifestyle, and introduces the content of the paragraph to come (the environmental benefits of a vegetarian lifestyle).

A concluding sentence is like a topic sentence: both summarize the claim explored in the paragraph. Just like the conclusion of a paper restates the thesis or main idea, the concluding sentence restates the claim you have made in the paragraph.

**Poor Concluding Sentence**: Vegetarianism is good for the environment.

**Better Concluding Sentence**: Overwhelmingly, scientific evidence suggests that vegetarianism positively impacts the environment by reducing harmful gas emissions and water waste.

The better concluding sentence above summarizes the specific claim(s) made in the paragraph, reminding the reader of the paragraph’s relationship to the essay as a whole.

# Offering Evidence for your Claims

Not only must you make claims, you must support them with evidence. Evidence comes in many forms: for an argumentative paper, you may use statistics or statements from experts to support your claims, while for a literary analysis, you might use textual evidence (quotations). The type of evidence you use depends on the type of essay you are writing and the nature of your argument. However, keep the following rule in mind: incorporate relevant evidence and explain how it supports your claim.

The two sample paragraphs below come from different kinds of writing assignments, but both follow the same principles. Both authors offer evidence and clearly relate the evidence to their claims. It is not enough merely to make a claim or simply to offer evidence: you must explain your evidence for it to be effective.

## Sample Paragraph A

Not only does vegetarianism have a positive impact on individual health, but it also benefits the environment by reducing water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, a division of the United Nations, a non-vegetarian diet uses 2.9 times the water resources that a vegetarian one does (Kraftson, Pohorelsky, and Myong 1**)**. Massive amounts of water are used both to provide water to livestock and to grow the crops that feed them. Reducing meat consumption would lead to substantial water savings, and at a time when worldwide water shortages impact the quality of life for millions of people, saving water by going vegetarian could also save human lives. In addition to saving water, a decrease in meat consumption could reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which speed up global warming. The chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has suggested that increasing numbers of livestock are rapidly and dangerously raising the levels of carbon dioxide emissions (Pachauri 7). Vegetarianism would lessen the demand for livestock, and this, in turn, would reduce harmful greenhouse gases. Overwhelmingly, scientific evidence suggests that vegetarianism positively impacts the environment by reducing harmful gas emissions and water waste.

**The topic sentence clearly summarizes the claim of the paragraph.**

**The author offers evidence (a statistic and an expert claim in these two cases) and then clearly relates the evidence to the claim.**

**The concluding sentence restates the claim of the paragraph.**

**The topic sentence clearly summarizes the claim of the paragraph.**

## Sample Paragraph B

The results of my research indicate that World of Warcraft (WoW) gamers exhibit Swale’s fifth characteristic of discourse communities: they have a specific lexis, or vocabulary (473). Evidence from both the surveys and the interviews I administered confirmed that WoW gamers have a number of unique terms that they use in the game and in real life when conversing with other WoW gamers. In survey question five (“What new words did you learn—or learn new meanings for—when you started playing WoW?”), respondents offered such lexical items as *mob*, *ding*, *tank*, and *raid*. In interviews, some of the same terms appeared. Interviewee C described some of the terms he uses when playing WoW, explaining that “The *tank* is one guy in a raid. He keeps the *mob* [“moving object”/computer-controlled enemy] busy while we attack from the sides and stuff. He has to have a ton of hit points, ‘cause he’s gonna take a lot of damage.” Similar responses were elicited from other interviewees, who explained their use of such terms as *ding* [to level up] and *nuke* [to do extensive damage]. Overall, the data included nearly one hundred terms used by WoW players in-game. Such evidence clearly demonstrates that WoW players have unique lexical items, and having a “specific lexis” qualifies them as a discourse community according to Swale’s fifth characteristic of discourse communities.

**The concluding sentence restates the claim of the paragraph.**

**The author provides evidence and then clearly relates the evidence to the claim.**