



Writing and Study Skills Services – Laurier Brantford Elements of an Academic Paragraph

Writing an academic paragraph can be a daunting task for students. We have created this handout to help clarify the structure of a paragraph in academic writing.

Remember, a paragraph is:

- A unit of thought
 - Which means: 1 idea + the supporting details

What's in a paragraph?

1. Topic Sentence

Your topic sentence is where you introduce your reader to what you will discuss within the paragraph. This should connect with your thesis or the main idea of the paper.

2. Elaboration (this sentence may or may not be necessary in a paragraph)

An elaboration further explains the idea presented in the topic sentence with additional detail to narrow the focus of the paragraph.

3. Evidence and Supporting Detail(s)

This is a key part of your paragraph. You provide evidence from your sources to support the point you are making. This can include paraphrases or summaries of academic research, quotes, examples, data, or basically any other material from your sources.

4. Interpretation/ Analysis/ Explanation

This part of the paragraph is where you explain how your evidence connects with the point of the paragraph and, therefore, how the evidence relates to supporting your thesis. It is important to remember not to assume your reader will understand your evidence without explanation. Help your reader see how the evidence is relevant.

- **Note:** If you have more than one piece of evidence for the paragraph, be sure to repeat elements 3 and 4 as needed.

5. Concluding Sentence

This is where you will wrap up the main point of the paragraph and include a transition to your next idea if possible.

Examples

Below is an example of a paragraph with one piece of evidence and explanation:

Harm reduction is a practice that is used in many areas of life for more than just drug addiction. Overall, the idea of harm reduction is not to cease the activity but to make it safer to continue. Harm reduction simply seeks to reduce the harmful effects of an activity, while the person continues the activity or cuts back (Harm Reduction Coalition, 2014). To further explain harm reduction, an example can be used; when riding a bike it is common practice to wear a helmet to help prevent head injury in case of a crash. The individual still gets to ride the bike, but uses practices to make the activity safer. This is the goal of harm reduction. In the case of cigarette smoking and the harm reduction practice of electronic cigarettes, the person still smokes, but uses a method that is less harmful. Addiction is incredibly difficult to overcome which makes harm reduction a popular approach to minimize as many dangers as possible.

Comment [w1]: This is the topic sentence

Comment [w2]: This is the elaboration

Comment [w3]: This is the evidence and supporting details

Comment [w4]: This is the interpretation/analysis/explanation

Comment [w5]: This is the concluding sentence

And to show what a paragraph looks like with more than one piece of evidence and the explanation that follows, see the example below:

While Foucault's main premise in *Discipline and Punish* was clearly reinforced by Botan's article, but was both supported and challenged through additional material written on internet surveillance. Mendola's (2015) article also reinforced the principles of Foucault's perspective on power, particularly the idea that the Panopticon is a proactive model. Mendola (2015) discussed how a Panopticon is effective in a school environment to prevent online bullying. By making students aware that technology is in place to monitor their activity online, it can be proactive for potential bullying situations (Mendola, 2015). This aligns well with Foucault's idea that it is the Panopticon's presence that holds power, not any actual action. The power of the Panopticon lies in the concept, not in the action. This deviates slightly from Botan's understanding of the Panopticon, but Foucault's concepts are still supported in both articles, each just drawing on different aspects. On the other hand, Brivot and Gendron (2011) disagree that surveillance in the workplace is a modern Panopticon. The authors argue that the original Panopticon model relies on a lack of agency on behalf of the prisoners, something that is not true of employees. Although the authors disagreed that workplace monitoring was a modern day Panopticon, Foucault's concepts can still be applied. In the case of the original Panopticon model, the inmates would have been without agency, but the model does not rely on that. In order to create a power dynamic where one individual or set of individuals has more power, it does not mean the other group is without any. You can build a power dynamic where one group has more power and one has less, which would make sense for a workplace situation. If the head office for a large corporation decides that they are going to monitor the internet usage of their staff, there is little that the employees can do to reverse their decision or at least not without significant uproar. Overall, Foucault's concepts can be seen in the current literature on the existence of an online Panopticon. Despite some material that seeks to challenge this connection, it can be argued that Foucault's principles strongly support a modern day Panopticon in an online context.

Comment [w6]: This is the topic sentence

Comment [w7]: This is the evidence and supporting details

Comment [w8]: This is the interpretation/analysis/explanation

Comment [w9]: This is the evidence and supporting details

Comment [w10]: This is the interpretation/analysis/explanation

Comment [w11]: This is the concluding sentence

For further information and help with paragraph writing, here are some helpful resources:

- For a thorough discussion of developing paragraphs for academic writing:
Faigley, L., Graves, R. & Graves H. (2008). *The brief penguin handbook*. Toronto, Ontario: Pearson Education Canada, p.43-60.
- For a brief overview of when to start a new paragraph:
Babington, D., Lepan, D. & Okun, M. (2009). *The Broadview guide to writing* (4th ed). Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, p. 271-72.