Paragraphs are the building blocks of your paper.

If a paragraph is longer than half a page, check to see if it contains more than one main idea; each new idea needs a new paragraph.

A paragraph should always be a minimum of four sentences long because each paragraph should be constructed using four elements:

1. **Topic Sentence** – the main idea frosting on top that touches every layer of the paragraph
2. **Evidence** – the moist cake layer that provides structure (information)
3. **Analysis** – the sweet, creamy layer that adds “flavor” (meaning)
4. **Concluding Sentence** – the foundation that holds it all together

Begin with a strong **topic sentence** that...

- Responds directly to the prompt and supports your thesis
- States the purpose of the paragraph and takes a position that is arguable
- Asserts one main idea phrased in your own words (not cited material)

Then add **evidence**: information gathered from outside research.

- All evidence should support your topic sentence.
  - **Facts and statistics** using studies, data from research, demographics
  - **Definitions** of terms or concepts from theories
  - **Personal communication** with an expert – in-person, by email

- **Paraphrase** rather than directly quoting to:
  - improve paper flow
  - ensure all the evidence is relevant to your topic sentence
  - show your professor that you understand the material well enough to state it in your own words

- **Cite every sentence** in which you use evidence from a source!
Creating Strong Paragraphs
Quick Guide

Balance evidence with analysis:
- Analysis is the connections you make between ideas. Without analysis, all you have is a list of facts the reader could obtain on his or her own.
- Analysis answers the question: Why is this evidence important and relevant to the topic sentence and the purpose of the paper?
- Consider the following questions:
  - How does the evidence you found fit together and what does it mean?
  - How does your evidence support your topic sentence (main idea?)
  - How do any concepts from theories that you mention apply to a client or population?
  - Why does your information matter to the larger discussion?

End with a concluding sentence:
- Based on this evidence and analysis, what do you want the reader to understand?

You are not simply restating the topic sentence. Instead, try to help the reader see how the evidence and analysis fit together to further your argument and explain your main idea.

Example of a Paragraph:

George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others may have developed during his first year of life. Bowlby’s attachment theory explains that infants have an innate desire to connect emotionally with their caregivers (as cited in Sroufe & Siegel, 2011). Avoidant attachment occurs when an infant becomes used to the caregiver being emotionally absent or disengaged (Bowlby, 1980). Records indicate that George’s mother did not soothe him when he cried and was reluctant to hold him, two things which might have helped him to develop healthy attachment. Infants who feel ignored by their caregivers may become unresponsive in an effort to become emotionally independent (Bowlby, 1980). George’s current antisocial nature indicates his avoidant attachment style continues in adulthood. His inability to connect emotionally with others hinders his ability to maintain strong friendships and to communicate well.