PARAGRAPHS ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF PAPERS

- Each paragraph begins with a distinct main idea, or topic sentence, that relates back to your paper’s thesis or purpose statement.

- The middle components should include evidence and analysis.

- The last sentence is a concluding sentence.

By constructing a paragraph in this way, your ideas will be specific, and your organization clear.

This tutorial will explain in detail the important components of paragraph structure.
WHAT IS IN A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph consists of four major pieces:

1. A Topic sentence (including a transition)
2. Evidence
3. Analysis
4. Concluding sentence

A strong paragraph will consist of four or more sentences.

These are both elements of supporting sentences.
PARAGRAPH PIE – OK, CAKE

One main idea per paragraph

Topic sentence

Evidence

Analysis

Evidence

Analysis

Concluding sentence

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CREATING A STRONG MIX

Layers of a cake give it dimension. In paragraphs you want to strive for a dimensional argument.

The **topic sentence** is the first in the paragraph, and it is also like the outer layer of frosting. Everything within the paragraph is part of the same cohesive mix.

The main layers are the alternating **evidence** and **analysis**. These layers hold up the cake and give it shape. Too much evidence and the cake may fall apart. The same thing happens with too much unsupported analysis. Just the right amount of both will create a balanced paragraph.

The last layer, the base of the cake, gives it a strong foundation. Likewise, a **concluding sentence** gives the paragraph its foundation. Without it, the reader may not understand why the evidence and analysis are relevant to your topic or what they mean.
THE TOPIC SENTENCE

Ask yourself: what is this paragraph about and why is it significant/relevant/important to understanding your thesis and the topic of the paragraph? Does it relate to assignment instructions?

The topic sentence should:

- Respond directly to an element in the prompt and **support your thesis**
- Be phrased using **your own words** and **your own idea**
- State what you will discuss in that particular paragraph (**the main point**)
- Have a clear relationship to the paragraph that came before it (**transition**)

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RESPOND TO YOUR PROMPT AND SUPPORT YOUR THESIS

Prompt:
   Explain the connection between the client’s early experiences and later relationships with others.

Thesis Statement:
   George’s disengagement from his mother and resulting attachment pattern, coupled with his adverse childhood experiences, may be contributing to his inability to form strong relationships with others as an adult.

Topic Sentence:
   George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others developed during his first year of life.

The topic sentence addresses the client’s early childhood like in the thesis statement but specifically focuses on the first year.
Source material:

Early disengagement from the mother or caregiver can have a harmful effect on later relationships.

Children who suffer from multiple adverse childhood experiences are more likely to develop a disorganized attachment style.

George’s mother was alcoholic and he spent half of his time living with his grandmother. Before his first birthday, he was taken away from his mother entirely due to findings of neglect. George has never been married or had a serious romantic relationship.

Topic Sentence:

George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others developed during his first year of life.

The topic sentence analyzes the relationship between ideas, concepts, and information and presents it in a clear and concise manner that does not restate the source material.
STATE THE MAIN IDEA OF THE PARAGRAPH

Topics to be covered:

1. George’s attachment style
2. Evidence of his inability to form relationships
3. Theory about early development affecting later life

Topic Sentence:

George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others developed during his first year of life.

The topic sentence states the main idea for the paragraph and is the starting point for all later topics covered in that paragraph.
CREATE A CLEAR TRANSITION

Last two sentences of a previous paragraph:

George’s mother often left George unattended and did not pick him up when he cried. This type of neglect, according to attachment theory, could lead to an insecure attachment.

Topic Sentence:

Within the first two years of his life, and more specifically in the time he was still in the care of his mother, George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others developed.

The topic sentence helps the reader to follow your reasoning and organization of ideas using a transition from the previous paragraph. Including a transition helps you keep track of progression of ideas, too.
USING TOPIC SENTENCES TO ORGANIZE

Before you start writing your body paragraphs, write out the topic sentences for every idea you are thinking about covering. Then, look at organization.

- Does each thought and idea flow logically into the next?
- If not, consider adding a transition or filling in the missing information with another topic sentence that will help fill that gap in logic.
- You may even need to reorder the paragraphs so they more naturally form an argument. Just make sure you’re still following all assignment instructions!

For more information about topic sentence outlines, see the video presentation here.
SUPPORTING SENTENCES: ALTERNATING EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

After your topic sentence, use supporting sentences to back up your claim.

- It is not enough simply to quote one person, offer a little analysis, and then move on to the next paragraph.
- In order to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of your argument, you will need to alternate evidence and analysis.
- Be thorough but succinct, and do not deviate from the main idea you expressed in your topic sentence.
- If you find yourself getting off-topic, it is time to create a new paragraph.
Evidence is information you gathered from outside research. Your evidence may include:

- Facts/statistics, such as demographic information, survey results, Census Bureau information, and results from research studies.
- Definitions of terms.
- Theories that support what you are arguing.
- Personal communication with an expert whether spoken, by email, or using another medium.

Note: evidence always comes from outside resources or personal communications. That means that evidence must always be cited unless it is common knowledge. If you asked five students in the social sciences, would they already know about this evidence or would you need to explain?
PARAPHRASE YOUR EVIDENCE

Remember, use direct quotations sparingly. It is better to paraphrase someone else’s argument than to directly quote because:

- If you have to put an idea into your own words, it will flow better with what you write. Each writer has a unique voice, and it can be jarring for the reader to try to switch back and forth between your voice and that of the people you are quoting.
- It shows a better understanding of the material.
- Often, if you directly quote, only one small part of the quote is relevant to your argument. Paraphrasing will help keep you on topic.
EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE

**Topic Sentence:** George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others may have developed during his first year of life.

Evidence to support this may include:

- 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).

- Infants who feel ignored by their caregivers may become unresponsive in an effort to become emotionally independent (Bowlby, 1980).
ANALYSIS

Evidence alone, however, is a list of loosely related facts. To tie everything together and propel the reader forward in your discussion, you must add your own analysis.

- How does the evidence you found connect together? Does it support the main idea expressed in your topic sentence?
- Why does your information matter to the larger discussion?
- How does a concept or theory apply to your particular area of focus?

In other words, you must explain how your evidence supports your claim.
EXAMPLES OF ANALYSIS

**Topic Sentence:** George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others may have developed during his first year of life.

Potential analysis for your topic sentence may include:

- Records indicate George’s mother did not soothe him when he cried and did not talk to him, two things which might have helped him to develop healthy attachment.
- George’s current antisocial nature indicates his avoidant attachment style continues in adulthood.

In these two examples, the relationship of the evidence to your topic – in this case George and attachment issues – is expressed clearly and in the author’s own words.
Once you feel you have adequately supported your topic sentence with evidence and analysis, wrap up your main point with a concluding sentence.

This sentence will not only remind your reader about the main point, but will also help you to more clearly express what the evidence and analysis mean as a whole.

Based on the evidence and analysis presented, what do you want the reader to understand?
EXAMPLE OF A CONCLUDING SENTENCE

**Topic sentence:**
George’s current attachment style and inability to connect with others may have developed during his first year of life.

**Concluding sentence:**
His inability to connect emotionally with others hinders his ability to maintain strong friendships and to communicate well with his wife.
PUTTING EVERYTHING TOGETHER

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 with his wife.