

ACADEMIC PARAGRAPHS

Unlike the paragraphs used in popular press books or articles, academic papers use highly structured paragraphs that follow a unique organizational pattern. They are typically 150-250 words and include 1-3 main points.

Note: For an outline of the **Assertion/Evidence/Commentary** pattern, see the “Five-Paragraph Essay Outline” handout.

THE STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC PARAGRAPHS

Topic Sentence

First main point

Evidence for this point

Commentary connecting the evidence to the point

Second main point

Evidence for this point

Commentary connecting the evidence to the point

Third main point

Evidence for this point

Commentary connecting the evidence to the point

Concluding sentence

Topic sentence—Introduces the main idea of the paragraph in a single statement and often uses one of the key words from the thesis

Assertion/Main point 1 (Optional point 2 & 3)—A specific point that supports the paragraph’s main topic

Evidence—Research cited from sources that proves and supports the topic sentence (quotations, paraphrases, examples, statistics, etc.)

Commentary—Provides a summary and analysis of the evidence and how it directly connects to the topic sentence and thesis statement

Concluding sentence—Summarizes the idea introduced in the topic sentence (not verbatim), creates a transition to the next paragraph, or makes an appeal for further research or study.

SAMPLE ACADEMIC PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

Thesis: The Christian writer argues in a way that points readers to Christ through ethical, emotional, and logical appeals.

- 1). Topic sentence:** The ethical appeal of Christian writers matters the most in crafting a strong argument.
- 2). Assertion/Main Point:** If writers call themselves Christians and ignore the basic principles of Christ-like love and compassion, then their readers will discount any arguments from the outset.
- 3). Evidence & Commentary:** Kennedy (2009) supports this idea, saying that Christian writers build their ethos or credibility when teachers’ lives match what they teach (p.180). Likewise, the actions of Christian writers should match the words they put forth.
- 4). Concluding Sentence:** While Christian writers should provide ethical, emotional, and logical arguments, the appeal to character strengthens their case the most.

PRACTICE NOW