



Handout 5

CONSTRUCTING A PARAGRAPH

The fundamental unit in written composition is the paragraph. When writing in academic English a paragraph must consist of a series of sentences that are grouped together to discuss one main subject. In formal academic English a paragraph will normally consist of three parts – topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence.

Element	Function	Position
The topic sentence	To introduce the overall idea that you want to discuss in the paragraph. Not too much by way of detail is included in the topic sentence.	This is usually the first sentence in a formal academic paragraph.
Supporting sentences	Here is where you get the details that relate to the topic sentence. Supporting sentences explain the idea expressed in the topic sentence.	These sentences constitute the body of the paragraph. Paragraphs can vary in length but in academic writing there are usually at least five sentences in a paragraph.
Concluding sentence	To help summarise, or bind the paragraph together.	Not all academic paragraphs have a concluding sentence, especially if the paragraph is very short. If a paragraph is long, however, it is a good idea to have a concluding sentence as it aids in developing cohesion in your argument.

The hamburger analogy is often used as an explanation for the construction of a paragraph. The top bun is like the topic sentence. This, together with the bottom bun (concluding sentence), holds all the juicy bits of the hamburger (supporting sentences) together.