

## How to Write a Paragraph

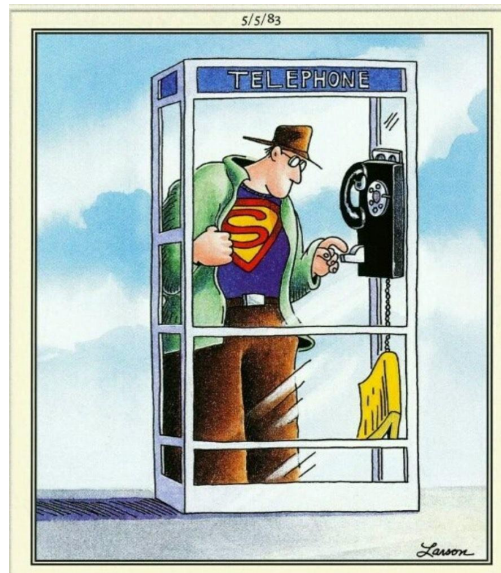
### What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a unit of sentences. The word “unit” means that all the sentences stick together because they focus on a single (or *unifying*) topic or sub-topic. In an essay, you will mostly be writing **body paragraphs**, which come after the introduction, and before the conclusion. The body paragraph, just like a paragraph that is on its own, has a specific structure: it introduces a topic, then provides evidence for that topic, then analyzes that evidence. Usually, a paragraph’s last sentence echoes the overall point, as well as the importance, of what has been shown.

### Three Functions of a Paragraph

- (1) Introduce a topic/point.
- (2) Provide details or evidence that relate to the topic/point.
- (3) Explain why the details or evidence develop the topic/support the point.

Example of a Paragraph Based on a Gary Larson comic.  
(Note: the paragraph is going to argue that this is funny)



### Step 1: INTRODUCE A TOPIC/POINT (based on the thesis: *The Gary Larson comic is funny.*)

The first sentence, often called a “topic sentence,” should tell your reader what the paragraph will argue. This means that if the reader only reads the first sentence, they will still know how the paragraph supports your thesis, or, if it’s a paragraph on its own, what this paragraph is about.

#### *Example*

In part, the comic makes people laugh because the image clashes with a popular impression of Superman.

Why is this a good topic sentence?

- (1) By reading it, you actually know what the whole paragraph is going to argue.
- (2) This topic sentence “echoes” or clearly relates to the thesis.

### Step 2: INTRODUCE EVIDENCE

After you’ve stated your basic point, you then want to present your evidence for that point. Introduce evidence by explaining the detail or by giving some context for a quote.

#### *Example:*

For instance, although Superman has gone into the booth to change into his superhero costume, which is what people expect him to do, he has become distracted as he looks for a quarter in the phone’s change slot.

Why is this a good evidence sentence?

- (1) The first part of the sentence explains what Superman is expected to do, which is important to know in order to understand that he’s NOT doing his job!
- (2) The second half of the sentence presents the “evidence,” or the actual detail that we can all see: Superman checking the change slot of the phone.

### Step 3: ANALYZE EVIDENCE

Instead of just providing a detail or a quote and then moving on, a paragraph should explain how that detail or quote proves what you are claiming it proves.

#### *Example:*

Showing that this supposedly great hero could actually forget about saving lives in order to dig for twenty-five cents contradicts his status as a selfless man who lives to serve others.

Why is this a good evidence sentence?

- (1) This sentence explains why looking for a quarter “clashes with a popular impression of Superman,” which is what the paragraph’s topic sentence promised to show!

#### Step 4: CLOSING STATEMENT

End your paragraph by reminding your reader of both what you have shown, and how this point supports your thesis.

#### *Example:*

By depicting Superman in a moment of petty self-interest, Larson ruffles the popular view that this is a man of exceptional integrity, a sudden shift in perspective that makes people laugh and helps to explain why the comic is funny.

Why is this a good closing statement?

- (1) This sentence uses what the paragraph has already shown to provide a final and summarizing insight into why the comic is funny.

#### **What does this paragraph look like when we put it all together?**

#### *Thesis*

The Gary Larson comic is funny.

#### *Body Paragraph Supporting Thesis:*

In part, the comic makes people laugh because the image clashes with a popular impression of Superman. For instance, although Superman has gone into the booth to change into his superhero costume, which is what people expect him to do, he has become distracted as he looks for a quarter in the phone's change slot. Showing that this supposedly great hero could actually forget about saving lives in order to dig for twenty-five cents contradicts his status as a selfless man who lives to serve others. By depicting Superman in a moment of petty self-interest, Larson ruffles the popular view that this is a man of exceptional integrity, a sudden shift in perspective that makes people laugh and helps to explain why the comic is funny.