

Literary analysis paragraphs

Advice & Practice

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The basics: What is a paragraph?

- A paragraph is a collection of sentences related to one topic
- You can think of a paragraph as a “mini essay”:

It has its own “introduction” (topic sentence), “body” (supporting sentences), and “conclusions” (the last sentence).

- Everything that you write should be relevant = focus on the idea that you want to express and make your sentences support it in a logical and coherent way.

How to structure a paragraph?

- Topic sentence
- Supporting sentences
- Last sentence

Topic sentence = state the topic

Indicates what idea the paragraph is going to deal with. When your paragraph contains a clearly stated topic sentence, your reader will know what to expect.

- Through the use of maritime symbolism in “Oh Captain! My Captain!”, Walt Whitman depicts the Civil War as a sea voyage.
- Benjamin Franklin is widely believed to be the embodiment of a self-made man.
- In “I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died,” Emily Dickinson challenges the solemnity associated with a deathbed scene.

Supporting sentences = demonstrate your point

Once you have stated the topic of your paragraph, you need to develop it by providing arguments to support your point and make the reader see what you mean.

- What information can I provide to support my point?
- What examples can I use to illustrate what I want to say?
- What does the reader need to know to see my point?

Last sentence = conclude the paragraph

Once you have demonstrated your point, write a concluding sentence. Such sentences have two main functions:

- To summarise the point that you have made.
- *To link one paragraph to the next one, so that there is coherence and unity to your writing (only if the paragraph is part of an essay).

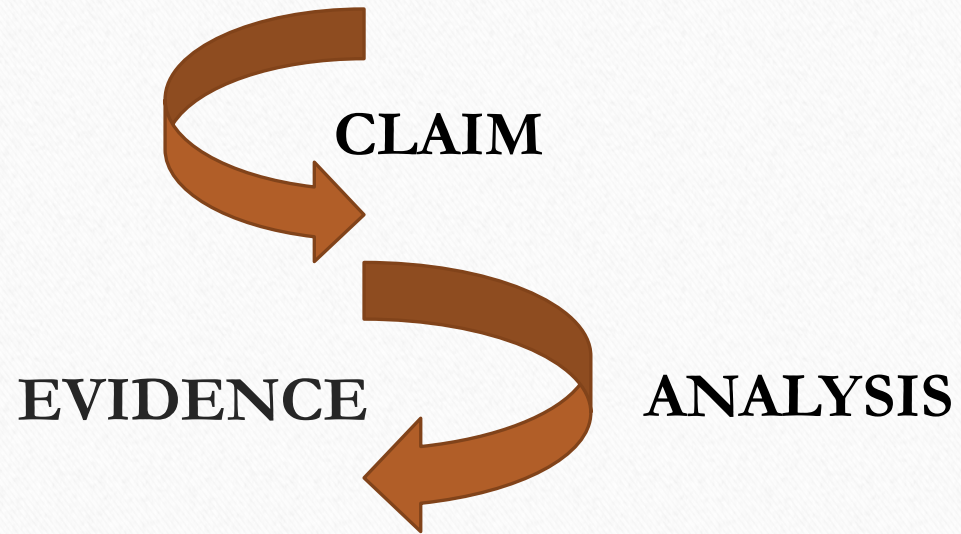
Common mistakes

- **Topic sentence not connected to supporting sentences** → lack of unity
- **Enumeration** → a list rather than a coherent, cohesive paragraph
- **Jumbled supporting sentences** → lack of logical flow
- **Description instead of argumentation** → weak or missing analysis
- **Repetition** → redundant ideas instead of development

Literary analysis paragraph: three components

(according to Paul Headrick 2014)

- **THE CLAIM** – the topic sentence that makes the claim that the paragraph will demonstrate
- **THE EVIDENCE** – the material from the text that supports the **CLAIM**
- **THE ANALYSIS** – explains how the **EVIDENCE** supports the **CLAIM**



Structuring your paragraph: Benjamin Franklin as a self-made man

- Prepare an outline

Who is **a self-made man?** (characteristics)

Why is **Benjamin Franklin an example of a self-made man?**

- What characteristics should I focus on? – choose only those that you will be able to argue.
- What's my topic sentence going to be in light of the **CLAIM** I am making?



Everything that you write should reflect your **CLAIM**

Benjamin Franklin as a self-made man

TOPIC SENTENCE/CLAIM

Benjamin Franklin is one of the best-known American founding fathers. He was also a printer and an inventor, in addition to being a diplomat.

What's wrong with this topic sentence/introduction???

Topic sentence (claim)

Options:

Examples: (1) Benjamin Franklin's many achievements throughout his life make him a perfect example of a self-made man—someone whose success is the result of personal effort rather than external circumstances.

(2) Today, we celebrate Franklin as one of the United States' Founding Fathers and a key architect of American democracy. Yet he also embodies the ideal of self-making, a concept deeply intertwined with the American Dream and central to the narrative of American identity.

Supporting arguments (**analysis** of **evidence** in light of the **claim**)

Claim: Benjamin Franklin's many achievements throughout his life make him a perfect example of a self-made man—someone whose success is the result of personal effort rather than external circumstances.



Evidence and analysis: Despite coming from a humble family of candle and soap makers, Franklin worked hard to improve himself. As he recounts in his *Autobiography*, he devised a method for correcting his vices and replacing them with positive traits. This method consisted in... In addition, he meticulously planned his days in order to make the most of his time.

Supporting arguments (**analysis of evidence** in light of the **claim**)

Claim (2): Today, we celebrate Franklin as one of the United States' Founding Fathers and a key architect of American democracy. Yet he also embodies the ideal of self-making, a concept deeply intertwined with the American Dream and central to the narrative of American identity.



Evidence and analysis: Self-making refers to someone whose hard work and effort have enabled them to climb the social ladder, regardless of their origins. From a young age, Benjamin Franklin was determined to become a better version of himself. One key element of his self-improvement was mastering the ability to express himself clearly and elegantly, both in speech and in writing.

Concluding sentence

- To conclude/To sum up..... (optional)

Benjamin Franklin's biography demonstrates the importance of ambition and consistent effort in achieving success. Moreover, his self-improvement is inseparable from his project of improving America, which he pursued through his work as an inventor, writer, and politician. To this day, Franklin continues to inspire people from all over the world to become the best versions of themselves.

Coherence

- **Do not dissociate the concept from the person:** the purpose of your analysis is to show how evidence supports your claim
- **Always think back to your claim** – use evidence from the text to support your claim, get rid of anything that does not contribute to this project.

Bibliography

- Headrick, Paul. *The Wiley Guide to Writing Essays about Literature*. Wiley Blackwell, 2014.
- Wallwork, Adrian. *English for Writing Research Papers*. Springer, 2016.
- Zemach, Dorothy, and Carlos Islam. *Writing in Paragraphs: From Sentence to Paragraph*. Macmillan, 2006.