

How To *Write* an Effective Paragraph

A successful paragraph is more than just a collection of sentences related to the same topic. Writing a convincing argument in an essay requires a series of effective paragraphs. Each paragraph should provide details supporting that single point of your argument and then show how the point in that paragraph relates to your thesis.

Here is a 3-step formula to writing an effective, meaningful, and convincing paragraph. The formula is **assert-illustrate-analyze**.



Assert: What is the point you want to prove in this paragraph?

This step is the “main idea” step of your paragraph. You should plainly assert the point that you will argue in the paragraph.

Example: In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson, the primary author, stated that the citizens of the American colonies tried to withstand suffering as long as possible before considering a separation from Britain.



Illustrate: What examples or quotes can you give to support your point?

This step is intended to give an example, whether from real-life or from a reference text, to illustrate your main point. An illustration may contain an example from your experience, a paraphrased point from a reference or even a direct quote with the correct citation.

Example: Near the beginning of the document, Jefferson stated that “accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed” (*Declaration of Independence*). He also provided a long list of grievances against King George III to illustrate all the wrongs he believed the American colonists had endured.



Analyze: How does your example or quote relate to your main point? What is the meaning of the point in this paragraph in relation to the thesis of your entire essay?

This step should explain how your illustration is relevant to your main point. If the paragraph is part of an essay, the last step of the analysis is to explain why the point in this paragraph is significant to proving the thesis for your entire essay.

Example: By outlining such a lengthy list, Jefferson clearly sought to show that the Americans were not rebelling just for the sake of starting a revolution; instead, he wanted to provide the reasons behind the

Continental Congress' decision to separate from Britain. Additionally, Jefferson strove to illustrate, in detail, how the Americans had patiently endured many actions and decisions of King George III that did not honor what they held as God-given rights that should have been protected by the government and legal system of the British empire.

Putting It All Together



Now that you know the 3 basic steps for writing a successful paragraph, read the combined paragraph parts below. Notice that the main idea of the paragraph is stated clearly, that the examples support the main idea, and that the analysis explains how the examples are relevant to the main idea.

In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson, the primary author, stated that the citizens of the American colonies tried to withstand suffering as long as possible before considering a separation from Britain. Near the beginning of the document, Jefferson stated that “accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed” (*Declaration of Independence*). He also provided a long list of grievances against King George III to illustrate all the wrongs he believed the American colonists had endured. By outlining such a lengthy list, Jefferson clearly sought to show that the Americans were not rebelling just for the sake of starting a revolution; instead, he wanted to provide the reasons behind the Continental Congress' decision to separate from Britain. Additionally, Jefferson strove to illustrate, in detail, how the Americans had patiently endured many actions and decisions of King George III that did not honor what they held as God-given rights that should have been protected by the government and legal system of the British empire.

Use the basic **assert-illustrate-analyze** formula to make each paragraph you write clear, logical, and meaningful!