

A paragraph is the way we divide our ideas in formal writing. To ensure your paragraphs are coherent and unified, follow these steps:

**1. Begin Each Paragraph with a Topic Sentence**

The topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph. It's like a thesis statement, but only for that one paragraph.

- Use your topic sentence as a guide for the content of your paragraph.
- Ask: Do the other sentences in this paragraph relate to my topic sentence? Or is it a new idea?

**2. Direct Quotes Should be Correctly Integrated and Explained**

When using direct quotes in your writing, they need to have an explanation of why they are significant.

e.g. As MacDonald argues, "students who use the Writing Centre regularly tend to perform better in class and receive higher marks" (12). *This again shows that many faculty and staff at St. Thomas believe the Writing Centre to be a valuable resource.*

Coherent paragraphs do not just talk about sources, they *integrate* them. They provide an explanation as to why the source is used and how it relates to the topic sentence and thesis statement of the essay. ALL sources should help to further understand your topic sentence.

**3. Ideas should have a logical flow.**

A core element of having a coherent paragraph – and subsequently a coherent paper – is making sure the argument you are making has a logical flow. Ask yourself: Does my content make sense chronologically? If someone who knew nothing about my topic read my paper, would they understand what I am arguing?

Remember to end your paragraph with a summary sentence.

Try this: read **only** your topic sentences from your paragraphs. If they still seem to have a logical flow, your paper will, too.

**4. When to start a new paragraph**

Each paragraph represents a new idea. While all your paragraphs will be related to the main argument of your paper, each separate point you are making needs its own paragraph.

i.e., if your paper is on why cats are better than dogs, one paragraph could argue that cats are cleaner than dogs and your next paragraph might argue that they are better to cuddle with. Even though you are making the same overall argument (that cats are better than dogs), because you are using different ideas to support this claim they get a different paragraph.

## Coherent Paragraphs Check List

- I have a clear topic sentence.
- My paragraph focuses on one main idea.
- Each of my sentences helps to further explain my topic sentence.
- I have provided an explanation or highlighted the significance of each direct quote I have used.
- I have integrated ALL my sources (both direct quotes and paraphrased information) and they help to further explain or support my topic sentence.

## Sample Paragraph<sup>1</sup>

**In addition to suffering from several illnesses** (*transitional phrase*), **marine mammals kept in captivity can be a threat to the people who interact with them** (*main idea*). According to a 2006 report by the Humane Society of the United States, 23 percent of people who have been in contact with marine mammals in captivity suffered from one or several rashes, and a fifth of the marine mammal workers suffered from a respiratory disease, including tuberculosis (Rose & Farinato, p.31). Contrary to what the public believes, marine mammals are not always happy and friendly; in fact, they can be aggressive and violent. Injuries among trainers who work in close proximity to the marine mammals are common, “ranging from lacerations to broken bones and shock. One man suffered a cracked sternum when butted by a dolphin, and a woman received a broken arm when similarly rammed” (Rose & Farinato, 2006, p.31). Not only do marine mammals injure workers, they sometimes kill them, too:

The aggression and violence of which orcas are capable were clearly witnessed at Sea World San Diego in August 1989, when an Icelandic female (Kandu V) rammed a northeastern Pacific female (Corky II) during a show. Although trainers tried to keep the show going, blood began to spurt from a severed artery near Kandu’s jaw. Sea World staff then quickly ushered away the watching crowd. Forty-five minutes after the blow, Kandu V died (Rose & Farinato, 2006, p.32).

**Clearly, marine animal workers are exposed to illnesses, injuries and death every time they are in contact with a marine mammal** (*concluding statement that summarizes the paragraph*).

## References

Rose, N. A., & Farinato, R. (2006). *The case against marine mammals in captivity* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). The Humane Society of the United States and the World Society for the Protection of Animals.  
<https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/case-against-marine-captivity.pdf>

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Algonquin College. (n.d.). *Paragraph coherence*. Guide to grammar and writing.  
[http://plato.algonquincollege.com/applications/guideToGrammar/?page\\_id=3402](http://plato.algonquincollege.com/applications/guideToGrammar/?page_id=3402)