

The Paragraph

The main purpose of a paragraph is to divide the thought of the writing into manageable sections. A paragraph should deal with one topic.

There is no standard length for a paragraph. If the point can be made briefly then the paragraph will be short. If there is a lot of information to be included then the paragraph will be longer. The paragraph should not be so long that the reader loses track of the thought being expressed. A good 'rule of thumb' is that paragraphs should be, on average, fewer than six sentences.

Every paragraph should have a beginning, middle and an end.

- Introduce topic with a short **signpost sentence**. This tells the reader what the paragraph is all about.
- Develop and explore the topic.
- Round off the topic and lead onto the next paragraph.

The first sentence, or signpost sentence, should be no more than 15 words.

Efficient readers use the signposts when they skim a document to decide how closely they need to read it.

Identifying topics for paragraphs is a useful stage in the planning process.