

Responding to Essay Questions and Paragraph Writing



Responding to Essay Questions

Before you do anything else, use your pencil or a highlighter to identify a few key parts of your prompt or essay question.

1. What is the overall question the prompt wants you to answer?

- Exploratory words may ask you to explain a difficult concept or explain why a particular piece of information is relevant: ♣ Trace ♣ Outline ♣ List ♣ Diagram ♣ Solve ♣ Define
- Direction words may ask you to defend or argue against an opinion-based issue: ♣ Defend ♣ Argue ♣ Debate ♣ Contend ♣ Justify
- Comparative words ask you to take two topics and write about them in reference to each other: ♣ Contrast ♣ Compare ♣ Distinguish ♣ Differentiate

2. What details is the question specifically asking you for?

- While the overall question might be how/why to test your understanding, you still need to back it up. Who/what/when/where questions will tell you what details you need to include

3. What is the minimum/maximum length your teacher wants?

- The teacher has to read and grade multiple classes' essays. For some teachers, this will mean they have got 200+ essays to read, so they often will set lengths for essay questions. You must meet the minimum length requirement and must not exceed the maximum length requirement your professor sets for answering any question.

ORGANIZATION!

Before you start writing, you should organize your ideas and plan your answer. Some tips:

- Read the prompt multiple times
- Breakdown and write a quick note that reminds you what you want to talk about to answer that part of the question.
- Write numbers to determine what order you want to present the information so that it makes sense.
- Write down any key words relevant to the topic that you need to make sure you address.

WRITING!

- Clearly articulate your argument in your answer. Make sure you have a clear thesis statement and provide clear explanations and details to support your main points. Make sure to start every paragraph with a topic sentence that connects to and develops your thesis.

Paragraph Writing

- **What is a paragraph?**

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic.

The Basic Rule: Keep one idea to one paragraph

The basic rule with paragraphing is to keep one idea to one paragraph. If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph.

There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and supporting evidence within a single paragraph. You can also have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph. If the single points start to get long, then perhaps elaborating on each of them and placing them in their own paragraphs is the route to go.

Elements of a Paragraph

UNITY

The entire paragraph should have a single focus.

COHERENCE

Coherence makes sure the information fits into that paragraph. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges.

Logical bridges

- The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence
- Successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form

Verbal bridges

- Key words can be repeated in several sentences
- Synonymous words can be repeated in several sentences
- Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences
- Transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences

Elements of Paragraph - Continued

A TOPIC SENTENCE

- A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. An easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of your paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph.

ADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT

- You should adequately discuss the topic of the paragraph (.i.e., the topic sentence). Your paragraph should develop your idea fully, which you are not going to achieve in three or four sentences.

Tips to Developing your paragraph:

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)

How do I know when to start a new paragraph?

You should start a new paragraph when:

- **When you begin a new idea or point.** New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
- **To contrast information or ideas.** Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
- **When your readers need a pause.** Breaks between paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in will help your writing be more readable. You would create a break if the paragraph becomes too long or the material is complex.
- **To end your introduction or start your conclusion.** Your introductory and concluding materials should always be in a new paragraph. Some introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their complexity.

Thesis statements

- Every paper you write should have a main point, a main idea, or central message. The argument(s) you make in your paper should reflect this main idea. The sentence that captures your position on this main idea is what we call a thesis statement.

Questions to ask When Writing your Thesis Statement

- 1- Is your thesis statement specific and clear?
- 2- Is your thesis statement too general?
- 3- Is your thesis statement original?

Topic Sentences

Every paragraph should include a topic sentence that identifies the main idea of the paragraph. A topic sentence also states the point the writer wishes to make about that subject. Generally, the topic sentence appears at the beginning of the paragraph. It is often the paragraph's very first sentence.

A paragraph's topic sentence must be general enough to express the paragraph's overall subject, but it should be specific enough that the reader can understand the paragraph's main subject and point.

Guidelines for Composing Topic Sentences

Put your topic sentence in the beginning of your paragraph.

- Be sure your topic sentence is focused. If restricted, a topic sentence discusses only one central idea. A broad or unrestricted topic sentence leads to a shaky, incomplete paragraph for two reasons:
 - The paragraph should contain enough information to support the topic sentence.
 - A broad topic sentence will not summarize or forecast specific information in the paragraph.
- Ex. ***One similarity between current and previous methods of communication relates to the form of communication.*** *In the past, both written forms such as letters were frequently used, in addition to oral forms such as telephone calls. Similarly, people nowadays use both of these forms. Just as in the past, written forms of communication are prevalent, for example via email and text messaging. In addition, oral forms are still used, including the telephone, mobile phone, and voice messages via instant messaging services.*

Conclusions

The conclusion should restate your thesis and sum up the main claims your paper discussed and your insight based on your analysis.

Conclusion Dos

- 1- Answer the “So What” Question. Why should anyone care about your topic and reading your paper?
- 2- Return to the theme or themes in the introduction which brings the reader a full circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario. Refer to the introductory paragraph by using key words, parallel concepts, and/or images that you also used in the introduction.
- 3- Include a brief summary of the paper’s main points, Restate but do not copy your thesis word for word.
- 4- Propose a course of action, a solution to an issue, or questions for further study. Point to broader implications

Conclusion Don'ts

- 1- Do not Introduce a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion
- 2- Do not include evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper

Sources

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/essay_writing/expository_essays.html
- <https://www.thoughtco.com/introductory-paragraph-essays-and-reports-1691081>
- <https://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/writing-a-good-conclusion-paragraph/>
- <http://websites.umich.edu/~exppro/info.html>