

Why we need paragraphs

In academic writing, paragraphs are used to help your reader follow your ideas and arguments easily. Read Extract 1 and decide where the sentence breaks and different paragraphs should be. As you are doing this, think about how easy it is to follow the information in the text.

Extract 1

mary seacole was born in 1805 in kingston jamaica her mother practised as a 'doctress' using medical knowledge which women had brought from africa and developed in the tropics from her mother mary inherited her medical as well as her ability to run a boarding house from her father a scottish military man she inherited her fascination with army life marys own medical reputation was established during a series of cholera and yellow fever epidemics she made her own medicines and emphasised high standards of hygiene as well as enforcing strict quarantine on victims by these methods she saved many lives on the outbreak of the crimean war mary volunteered her services to the british army although she had worked for the army before at its own request this time she was turned down undaunted mary made her own way to the war zone once in the crimea she not only nursed the soldiers but also ran a hotel and sold food wine and medicines after the war mary was treated as a celebrity she was decorated by the governments of four countries in england a poem in her honour was published in punch and even the royal family requested her company and medical expertise

Comments

You probably found it very difficult to read Extract 1 and would have found yourself frequently re-tracing your steps and re-reading sections to try and obtain meaning from the piece of writing. As a writer, you must always think about your reader and how you can present your information to them in the clearest way. Now read Extract 2 where the sentences and paragraphs are clearly marked throughout.

Extract 2

Mary Seacole was born in 1805 in Kingston, Jamaica. Her mother practised as a 'doctress', using medical knowledge which women had brought from Africa and developed in the Tropics. From her mother, Mary inherited her medical as well as her ability to run a boarding house. From her father, a Scottish military man, she inherited her fascination with army life.

Mary's own medical reputation was established during a series of cholera and yellow fever epidemics. She made her own medicines and emphasised high standards of hygiene as well as enforcing strict quarantine on victims. By these methods she saved many lives.

On the outbreak of the Crimean War, Mary volunteered her services to the British Army. Although she had worked for the army before, at its own request, this time she was turned down. Undaunted, Mary made her own way to the war zone. Once in the Crimea, she not only nursed the soldiers, but also ran a hotel and sold food, wine and medicines.

After the war, Mary was treated as a celebrity. She was decorated by the governments of four countries. In England, a poem in her honour was published in *Punch* and even the Royal Family requested her company and medical expertise.

Extracts taken from: Cottrell, S. (2008) *The study skills handbook*. 3rd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.