

Writing successful paragraphs

Each paragraph that you write will focus on one idea or issue that is linked to your main essay question. When you find yourself discussing a new idea, it is time for a new paragraph.

Read Extract 1 and note down the main idea that the author discusses in each paragraph.

Paragraphs 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.

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.

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

Comments on Extract 1

In Extract 1, the first paragraph provides background information. It begins by introducing the main focus of the piece, Mary Seacole, before providing the reader with information about her parentage. Note that the author only focusses on aspects of Mary's parents that are relevant – her mother's medical knowledge and her father's military background.

Paragraph 2 focusses on Mary's early medical reputation, offering information about her early work with patients and the actions that she took to prevent the spread of disease. Academic Liaison, Employability and Skills (ALES) Page 2 of 3 Email us: academicskills@cumbria.ac.uk

Paragraph 3 provides details about Mary's work in the Crimean War. The writer shows how determined Mary was to help by telling the reader she was turned down by the army but got involved anyway.

The final paragraph discusses the impact of Mary's war work. The author tells the reader about the recognition Mary received for her work.

Writing paragraphs in academic writing

In academic writing, paragraphs are structured in a similar way to a whole essay – they contain an introduction, main information and a conclusion. Look at Extract 2 and identify which parts of the paragraph show this structure.

Paragraphs Extract 2

A number of problems associated with the traditional routines of handover practices have been identified. Baldwin and McGinnis (1994, pp. 61-64) find that many handovers are unnecessarily lengthy which means that there is an unacceptable period of time during each shift when nurses are not available in the ward or unit. Another area that has received attention is the content and presentation of handover information. Wills (1994, p. 36) observes that “an unprofessional approach has been noted among some nurses, with derogatory comments about patients or their families”. Lastly, there is the issue of what information nurses actually pass on during the handover. It is argued that, often the focus of a nurse’s report is their own actions during their shift, rather than information obtained about the patient (Professional Nurse, 1997, p. 637). Thus, many serious problems have been identified in traditional handover practices which may reflect on the professional standing of nurses in this profession.

Extract taken from: <http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/>

Comments on Extract 2

The first sentence in Extract 2 tells the reader that this paragraph is about the problems that have been identified in handover practices. Note that the author uses the plural “problems” which suggests that they will discuss more than one problem within the paragraph, and they do. Following on from the first sentence, the author presents three issues that they have found in the literature that they have read and they offer the reader a reference for each problem they mention. In the last sentence, the writer sums up the topic and also points the reader in the direction of what they will go on to discuss in the next paragraph – the professional standing of nurses.

Extract 3 shows you how the paragraph is split into **introduction**, **main information** and **conclusion**.

Paragraphs Extract 3

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Planning your paragraphs

You can use the following table to help you to plan your paragraphs in your writing.

1. Introduction (jot down the idea you plan to discuss in the paragraph)	2. Main Information (jot down the main information you want to include, along with relevant references)	3. Conclusion (draw your idea to a close and provide a link to the idea you will discuss in the next paragraph)

Remember: Every paragraph that you include in your essay needs to add something to your discussion. Don't be afraid to delete paragraphs that do not help you to answer the question you have been set.