

# Academic Paragraphs

- Unlike the paragraphs used in popular press books or articles, academic papers use highly structured paragraphs that follow a unique organizational pattern. Academic paragraphs are typically 150-200 words (or half a page double-spaced) and include 1-3 main points. Below is a basic outline of how to craft a paragraph:

## 1. Topic Sentence

- **First main point**
    - **Evidence** for this point
    - **Commentary** connecting the evidence to the point
  - **Second main point**
    - **Evidence** for this point
    - **Commentary** connecting the evidence to the point
  - **Third main point**
    - **Evidence** for this point
    - **Commentary** connecting the evidence to the point
  - **Concluding sentence**
- **Topic Sentence:** introduces the main idea of the paragraph in a single statement and directly relates to one of the reasons provided in the thesis statement. Topic sentences also use the same key phrases from the thesis to help the reader follow the logical order of the argument.
  - **Main Points:** a specific point that supports the main idea of the paragraph topic and transitions into the first section of supporting evidence.
  - **Evidence:** the main points of the paragraph cite information from research that proves and supports the topic sentence. Evidence sentences typically include summaries, paraphrases, quotations, examples, logic, explanations, or ideas. The types of evidence in the paragraph do not have to be identical. Preferably, the evidence is paraphrased with a few shorter quote-phrases embedded within a sentence; otherwise, several strands of long quotes can make writing unclear to the reader.
  - **Commentary:** provides a summary and analysis of the evidence, containing the same key phrases used in the topic sentence. This explains how the evidence directly connects to the main point in the topic sentence and thesis statement.
  - **Concluding Sentence:** summarizes the points introduced in the topic sentence and discussed/proven in the paragraph. Similar words are used to show a direct relationship with the topic sentence. The concluding sentence does not introduce new information, but it may make an appeal for more research or study.

## Example Paragraph

- **Example thesis:** “The Christian writer argues in a way that points readers to Christ through logical, emotional, and ethical appeals.”

**The ethical appeal of Christian writers matters the most in crafting a strong argument.** If writers call themselves Christians and ignore the basic principles of Christ-like love and compassion, then their readers will discount any arguments from the outset. Kennedy supports this idea, saying that Christian writers build their ethos or credibility through “Christian works, the life of the teacher, and the extent to which it accords with his teaching, as known to the audience. Ethos thus becomes moral authority.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the actions of Christian writers should match the words they put forth. The opposite is also true. If Christian writers exemplify biblical principles in their arguments, their readers will likely acknowledge the strength of their ethos. Unlike the “invented ethos” outlined by Aristotle—which involves fabricating one’s character to appear more persuasive<sup>2</sup>—living out one’s faith can go a long way in building credibility. An authentic walk builds the Christian writer’s argument in a number of significant ways. While one’s intellectual and emotional arguments matter as well, God cares more about a person’s character than anything. Christ does not call his followers to be intelligent or connect with people emotionally; rather, he focuses on their moral integrity. As it says in 1 Samuel 16:7, “the Lord looks at the heart.”<sup>3</sup> So while Christian writers should provide logical, emotional, and ethical arguments, the appeal to character strengthens their case the most.

- The **topic sentence** addresses a specific point from thesis (the Christian writer’s ethical appeal) and uses key words from it (“ethical appeal,” “Christian writers,” “argument”).
- This paragraph includes several **points to support the topic sentence** and introduce the **evidence**. The wording is similar to the topic sentence so that the reader recognizes the outline of the paragraph.
- This paragraph includes **evidence** that cites information from the research to support the points of the topic sentence.
- The **commentary sentences** explain the evidence preceding it, but they do not necessarily have the same wording.
- The **concluding sentence** does not introduce new information, but connects the topic of the paragraph to a reason in the thesis statement (“ethical appeals”).

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1. George A. Kennedy, *Classic Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 180.

2. Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2009), 197.

3. 1. Sam. 16:7 (New International Version).