

Painless Paragraphs

The NO TEARS Plan for Composing Academic Prose



Writing at the Master's and Doctoral Level

Checklist for the elements in each paragraph:

Topic Sentence

Evidence

Analysis

Repeat as necessary

Synthesis



Topic Sentence and Evidence

Each paragraph should start with a clear topic sentence that states what the paragraph is about. The topic sentence (T) contains a claim that is supported by one or more following sentences presenting evidence (E) to support that claim.




Analyze and Repeat

Rather than simply presenting the evidence and being done with it, however, the writer must also analyze (**A**) the evidence to answer questions like "How is this known?" and "What details of *how* this information was found, collected, or otherwise arrived influence its reading, interpretation, or application?" Some evidence requires more analysis and discussion than others (e.g., controversial claims), or pointing out how it aligns/agrees with or does n't align/agree with other sources – so repeat as necessary (**R**).

Synthesize

Once you have finished this presentation of evidence and your analysis of the evidence, it's time to synthesize (**S**) the findings and explain to the reader what these things mean when put together – and, more specifically, what the ramifications of all the things that you've discussed are to your paragraph's topic, section, or paper as a whole.



Paragraph: 5-7 Sentences

Topic Sentence: State what you're writing about in this paragraph.

Evidence/Argumentation: Support the claim you've made in your topic sentence.

Analyze: Discuss the evidence and how it connects to your topic, explaining this as necessary.

Repeat Steps 2-3 as necessary.

Synthesis: Discuss what all of these things mean when put together.

Concluding/Transitioning Sentence: Finish your discussion of what these things mean *or*

connect them to the next stage of this discussion in a following paragraph.

Complex Arguments

If you follow these steps, it's very easy to write papers that are convincing, grounded in the literature, and easy to follow. Sometimes this follows strict sentence-by-sentence divisions, and sometimes the elements are mixed into the same sentence (this is increasingly expected at the doctoral level, as part of making more complex arguments).



Here's an example of what this looks like:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts's economy was strongly affected by the Great Recession of 2006-2010 (Topic Sentence). The estimated total value of commercial real estate in the City of Boston dropped by \$2 billion from January 2006 to December 2006 (Graves, 2010; Evidence). Residential real estate prices in Boston dropped by 53% in this same period (Nidaye, 2012; Evidence and Analysis comparing it to the previous sentence). This significant change in property values over a short period of time had significant ramifications for area businesses (Synthesized new claim requiring additional evidence to support). For example, short-term interest rates increased by 15%, (Evidence) a record increase that made it difficult for businesses to borrow money (Nehru, 2006; Ren, 2015; Evidence and Analysis). These increased borrowing costs were a contributing factor in construction industry layoffs in Greater Boston, with 15,432 sector jobs lost in 2007 (Baluta, 2007; Evidence and Synthesis). These economic impacts are unlikely to have improved fundraising at Opera Boston (Transition).