

Writing Rules for a Paragraph Response to Text

Always include the basic building blocks of a paragraph when writing in response to an assignment: a topic sentence followed by 5-7 supporting sentences (at least) and concluded with a closing sentence. When responding to a question about literature, your paragraphs should always meet the following criteria:

Topic Sentence

- ◆ **Place the title of work and name of author in the first sentence.**
Novel, play, book, web site, painting, or movie titles must be underlined or *italicized*
Short story, article, essay, web page, or poem titles must be placed in “quotation marks”
- ◆ **Briefly restate the question in the topic sentence and make brief mention of your answer.**
However, do not simply copy the words straight from the prompt. Paraphrase instead.

- ◆ **Provide SPECIFIC examples from the work.**
- ◆ **Use transition words** (first, also, then, for example, finally, although, however, etc.)
- ◆ **Write in the present tense.**
- ◆ **Indent *only* at the beginning of a paragraph.**
- ◆ **Include a concluding sentence that wraps up your paragraph.**

What to avoid in all writing assignments

- ◆ **Do not use the words “I think . . .” or “I believe . . .” in your formal writing.** These phrases weaken your points, and they are unnecessary when you consider that your audience will assume you think or believe the points that *you* write. In fact, unless the writing is about you, *avoid using first-person perspective* in your writing.
- ◆ **Do not use first or second person perspective in your writing.** Write only in third person. First person should only be used if the question specifically asks for your feelings or for a story about you. Second person (you) should be used only when you are writing a letter to a specific person or when you are writing instructions. Almost every other time you use “you” in your writing, you really mean “anyone” or “most people,” and this usage is considered informal.
- ◆ **Avoid beginning sentences with “It is . . .” or “There are . . .” or “There is . . .”** These phrases are weak methods of starting a sentence. More direct beginnings are almost always possible.
For example: It is clear that Peter Jenkins’s experiences changed his life.
Clearly, Peter Jenkins’s experiences changed his life.
- ◆ **Never refer to your own writing.** Avoid phrases such as “This essay is about . . .” or “In this paragraph I will discuss . . .” Let your writing speak for itself. You do not need to tell your reader what you are doing; just do it.
- ◆ **Avoid unclear or unnecessary pronouns (it, this, those, these).** Always be sure that what the pronoun refers to is clear. Also avoid unnecessary pronouns as in the following beginning: “In this novel it shows that . . .” Instead, make the noun the subject of the sentence: “This novel shows that . . .”
- ◆ **Never use abbreviations in formal writing.** Abbreviations such as “&” for “and,” “b/c” for “because” and “w/” for “with” are for informal notes only.
- ◆ **Numbers** that can be written in two words or less should be written; use numerals for all others. For example: three one hundred 516 3,765 2 ³/₄
- ◆ **Avoid using *although* when you really need *however*.** It is acceptable to use *however* at the beginning of a sentence, but if you begin a sentence with *although*, then it must begin a dependent clause which must be followed by an independent clause.
Incorrect: I don’t like what Sarah said about me. Although, she is still my best friend.
Correct: I don’t like what Sarah said about me. However, she is still my best friend.