

Hints for Writing Effective Paragraphs of Literary Analysis

Well-organized paragraphs have five components that work together to produce a coherent, unified product. Think of each paragraph as a mini-essay endeavoring to prove one aspect of your thesis statement. That is, each paragraph should

1. Make a debatable claim (the topic sentence/"thesis")
2. Provide specific proof for that claim (the illustration or support)
3. Show how the evidence supports the claim (the analysis)
4. Contain effective transitions both within the paragraph and between paragraphs so that the reader can follow the logic of the argument (transitions).
5. A concluding sentence that provides closure to the paragraph.

Let's break these components down and define each one.

Topic Sentence (Thesis): The topic sentence is to the paragraph what the thesis is to an entire essay. That is, a paragraph's topic sentence states the claim or argument of that paragraph. The topic sentence usually asserts a claim that will support one part of the essay/paragraph's larger opinion/argument. For example:

In Ray Bradbury's short story, "There Will Come Soft Rains" the author shows that mankind's desire to control and isolate itself from nature will be its undoing.

This essay has a lot to prove. It must begin by proving that mankind does indeed have a desire to control and isolate itself from nature and—later—that this specifically is what destroys mankind. Thus, the topic sentence of the first section of the body might be:

It may not be easy to see at first glance how humans want to control and isolate themselves from nature, especially because humans are absent from the very beginning of the story. However, the description of the house and how it manipulates the internal environment for the humans reveals people's desire to overcome nature.

Notice that, like a thesis, a topic sentence can be more than one sentence if necessary.

Support: Support or evidence usually refers to quotations from or summary of the literary work. Without support, your topic sentence will go unproven and your paragraph will fall flat. (If your topic sentence does not seem to require support, it probably isn't an effective topic sentence to begin with). Working with the topic sentence above, we might use the following two pieces of evidence:

1. "The appliances (an aluminum wedge scarper, tiny robot mice) that take of the dirt and garbage left behind."
2. "The house's protection from the rain."
3. "The house inquires a password for people who want to enter."

Analysis: With analysis, you tell your reader how you want him or her to understand the quotation or summary you have provided as support. As a writer, you can't necessarily assume that your reader will draw the same conclusions you have drawn from the evidence.

For example, some people might interpret the narrator's treatment of Sonny's friend as kind, because he gives the friend a cigarette and some money. But that interpretation doesn't work for your argument, so you need to elaborate, through your analysis, on your own interpretation. Thus, support and analysis go hand in hand.

Here's an example of some analysis following the support cited above. The **bold** sentences are primarily analytical, while the underlined ones convey the evidence itself:

The house's everyday duties show people's desire to control their surroundings—i.e. nature. The reader first hears of the house make breakfast for the family and, when no one appears to eat it, clean it up: “At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink.” **In addition,** the house's tiny mice clean up the dirty floor and even get rid of the dog that dies. **There is no task too big or small for the house to do for the humans, so they don't have to get their hands dirty with elements from the natural world.** A short while later in the story, the house lets the inhabitants know when to put on galoshes and raincoats. **This reminder is not only a convenience to the family, but also serves to protect the inhabitants by letting them know what to expect when they go outside. They don't have to interact with nature by taking the risk of stepping—or even looking—outside. This “ideal” house means the humans can control the outside world's elements like dirt, rain, wind, and temperature.**

Transitions: Well organized paragraphs use transitions between the topic sentence, support, and analysis which let the reader know where the argument is going. Simple transitions such as "for example," "for instance," "therefore," "however," and "also" are useful to show relationships between ideas.

Concluding Sentence: This sentence found at the end of your paragraph, should simply restate the opinion or argument that you stated in your topic sentence. However, you should rephrase the statement in new words, as to not sound repetitive. For example:

In conclusion, “There Will Come Soft Rains” ultimately illustrates that nature has adapted beyond mankind's comprehension, and humans will never be able to wield true control over Mother Nature.