

□ WRITING PARAGRAPHS

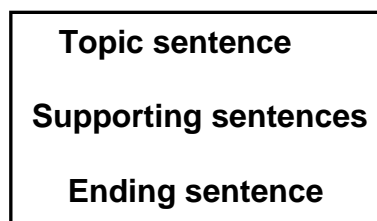
All text is divided into clearly marked paragraphs. They are the building blocks of your essay, helping you as **the writer understand and manage** your ideas clearly and helping **your reader to follow** your ideas.

Each paragraph is a **group of sentences developing one main idea**. The points in the paragraph should be organised in a **logical and coherent structure** which the reader can follow easily. There should be **smooth linking** from one sentence to the next so that the relationship of ideas is clear.

Paragraphs are important in developing the main idea of your essay, for example, by adding information, making comparisons, giving explanations and examples. Each paragraph should be long enough to develop a topic sufficiently. In academic texts, they are usually 4-10 sentences long (80-200 words).

The structure of a paragraph

general
↓
specific



- **Topic sentence:**

This sentence contains the central idea of the paragraph. It makes a statement that the rest of the sentences develop. It often - but not always - comes at the beginning of the paragraph.

It consists of: **main idea + controlling idea**

Examples:

Weak: *A seminar is a group discussion.*

This gives only a main idea and does not provide a controlling idea. In other words, it does not indicate how the paragraph will be developed.

Bad: *A seminar is a group discussion which is often used for students who are studying law and need to discuss areas of the law and hear the views of other students.*

This is not useful as a topic sentence. It contains too many ideas and would therefore be difficult to develop into a reasonable paragraph.

Good: *A seminar enables law students to improve their understanding of the law through group discussion.*

Good: *There are three main advantages of seminars for law students.*

These topic sentences have a clear main idea and controlling idea which could be developed in a paragraph.

• **Supporting sentences:**

These sentences add specific detail to the topic of the paragraph. They develop the controlling idea by providing evidence such as examples, statistics, dates or description, or support for your argument from other writers through quotations, paraphrase or summary.

Information in a paragraph may be presented in different ways:

- **comparison** and/or **contrast** between two different systems or theories such as a comparison of two different kinds of legal systems.
- **extended definition** such as an explanation of a particular legal concept.
- **cause/effect** analysis of a judgment.

• **Ending sentence:**

In the same way that a topic sentence is important to indicate the main idea of a paragraph, an ending sentence is useful to achieve flow and help the reader to understand how the idea has been developed. Some ending sentences might be a conclusion to the ideas in a paragraph, but other ending sentences might act as a link, a 'bridge', to the next paragraph. This is important as it maintains the flow of your writing. In other words, the reader can follow the development of your ideas easily.

An ending sentence can have different functions.

- It can:**
- *restate the topic sentence*
 - *summarise the main ideas of a paragraph*
 - *make a conclusion from the information given in a paragraph*
 - *predict the future / suggest possible solutions*
 - *provide a link to the next paragraph*

Here is a well-structured paragraph on the use of seminars for law students.

With regard to the advantages of seminars, there are, in essence, two main aspects in which they are useful. First of all, as a supplement to lectures, seminars provide teachers with opportunities to assist students in referring back to the content which lectures have already included. In other words, teachers use seminars to give guidance to students and emphasise the main points for them to pay special attention to. Another important advantage of this method of instruction is that teachers are able to use them to inspire the students with interest and curiosity to explore new fields of research. Some bright students may set out to do research on controversial academic problems or an issue that they are interested in. Hence, in so doing, seminars play an important role in showing ways in which students may go even further in their research.

Here is the same paragraph broken into separate sentences so that you can see how it has been developed. It has a clear topic sentence. The ideas are signposted with appropriate linking words. The paragraph is rounded off with a concluding sentence.

Topic sentence

→ With regard to the advantages of seminars, there are, in essence, two main aspects in which they are useful.

Linking words and expressions

→ **First of all**, as a supplement to lectures, seminars provide teachers with opportunities to assist students in referring back to the content which lectures have already included.

→ **In other words**, teachers use seminars to give guidance to students and emphasise the main points for them to pay special attention to.

→ **Another important advantage** of this method of instruction is that teachers are able to use them to inspire the students with interest and curiosity to explore new fields of research.

→ **Some bright students** may set out to do research on controversial academic problems or an issue that they are interested in.

→ **Hence, in so doing**, seminars play an important role in showing ways in which students may go even further in their research.

Concluding sentence

- **'Bridging' between paragraphs**

It is not only important to have a clear structure within a paragraph but there also needs to be a clear structure in the whole piece of writing. In the same way that ideas are linked within a paragraph, paragraphs also need to be linked so that there is coherence (flow) in your writing and the reader is aware of the progression of ideas throughout the text. We can think of these links paragraphs as **'bridges'**. This **'bridging'** can be achieved in different ways – e.g. by linking expressions; by repeating words or ideas in the next paragraph; by using similar words and expressions (parallel words and expressions); and making sure that the ideas flow.

- **Read this essay on seminars and note how the writer has achieved coherence (flow) both within the paragraphs and 'bridging' between paragraphs.**

Essay title

Evaluate the use of seminars for law students in the light of your experience in the Law School.

There are several means by which law students may be taught in the university such as lectures, tutorials and seminars. Among **these**, seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods, particularly in the School of Law, as **they** offer students the opportunity to interact with tutors and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas. **Despite** the **benefits**, there is, however, a **negative** side to the use of seminars as a teaching tool. This essay will evaluate the use of seminars for teaching post-graduate students of law by examining **the positive aspects** and **the drawbacks** of this method of instruction.

In paragraph 1, the writer uses: **most effective methods, benefits, positive aspects**. Paragraph 2 is linked to the first paragraph by the word: **advantages**

You should also note that the writer expresses the idea of the advantage of seminars with a range of parallel (similar) expressions, such as **benefits, positive aspects, advantages**.

With regard to the advantages, in essence there are two main aspects in which they are useful. **First of all**, as a supplement to lectures, seminars provide teachers with opportunities to assist students in referring back to the content which lectures have already included. **In other words**, teachers use seminars to give guidance to students and emphasise the main points for them to pay special attention to. **Another important advantage** of this method of instruction is that teachers are able to inspire the students with interest and curiosity to explore new fields of research. Some bright students may set out to do research on controversial academic problems or an issue that

they are interested in. Hence, in so doing, seminars play an important role in showing the ways in which students may go even further in their research.

In paragraph 3, the writer discusses the **disadvantages**. This is linked to paragraph 2 contrasting with the idea of advantages. It also refers back to paragraph 1: **negative side, drawbacks**

The **disadvantages**, however, should not be ignored. In the light of my own experience, the main problem that seminars have at present is that discussion between teachers and students can be considerably limited. To a large extent, in each seminar, teachers tend to play a major role in leading the process. The immediate and direct consequence of this situation is that students may become passive participants in the seminar. Thus, the purpose of the seminar cannot be achieved because the students are not being encouraged to express their ideas freely. This is apart from the other reason, namely that some seminars often lack good preparation in the organisation and materials. In fact, the key players in seminars should be the students themselves rather than the teachers.

In paragraph 4, the concluding paragraph, the writer refers back to his stated opinion about seminars in the first paragraph as *one of the most effective methods of instruction*. He sums up by confirming his viewpoint. He acknowledges a principle weakness and makes a recommendation.

In the final analysis, I feel that using seminars in the LLM class is **of great use** to students and that **more have to be allocated** for even greater benefits. They may, however, **need to be structured** so that they do not result in being a waste of time.

writer's opinion

acknowledges a principle weakness

recommendations