

## Effective Paragraphing

An effective paragraph:

- should have ONE clear point i.e. it **says** one specific thing.
- should have ONE clear purpose i.e. it **does** one specific thing.

### What paragraphs SAY...

With the exception of paragraphs used to narrate a complex experience or event (which still have clear foci), most paragraphs make ONE clear point. That point is typically made in the topic sentence of the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph supports and explains that point with evidence and reasons. To summarize, you should be able to state the main point of each paragraph with a single sentence (called the topic sentence); every other sentence in that paragraph should clearly support or develop that main point. When moving onto a different point, start a new paragraph.

### What paragraphs DO...

Most paragraphs within an essay do one of three things:

- they **present** examples, facts, or ideas from a source for (later) analysis. This is essentially narration, description, or summary.
- they **analyze** examples, facts, or ideas in order to make specific points. In other words, they dissect and interpret relevant evidence, arguments, and theories.
- they **synthesize** points or ideas from various sources to make new theories, develop previous points, raise new questions, or draw conclusions.

### Presentation Paragraphs

Presentation paragraphs give readers information that they, presumably, aren't familiar with. They may describe something that you want to analyze or complicate: an experience, event, object, text, or idea. They may, alternatively, present a source or claim from a source that you want to challenge, explore or apply later in the essay. Presentation paragraphs do not typically include *analysis* (see below). They help the reader to separate the things that you see as straightforward facts from original claims that you are making through analysis.

### Analysis Paragraphs

In analysis paragraphs, you zoom in on smaller features of the object or text in order to answer some critical question(s). In these paragraphs, you may point out and interpret important aspects of your evidence, "close read" a text, explain your reasoning, make comparisons, or use a theoretical lens to better understand something else. You might see these paragraphs as working through specific facts or ideas you've previously presented in the attempt to find an answer to the central question of your essay (or to demonstrate how you worked through available evidence and theories to develop your own thesis).

### Synthesis Paragraphs

You need synthesis paragraphs when:

1. **complicating** or **qualifying** your argument (or someone else's) up to that point through the engagement and incorporation of counter-evidence and counterarguments.
2. **combining the ideas of multiple sources** to expose an insightful similarity or difference or create a novel concept.
3. **summarizing** your previous complex argument in order to transition to a different path of inquiry (often by raising new questions). You often need a synthesis paragraph when transitioning between major sections of an essay. Hence, in this sense, they can also be thought of as transitional paragraphs or mini-conclusions.
4. **drawing a conclusion** based on the incorporation (i.e. synthesis) of all the analysis conducted in the essay.

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Using Says/Does Analysis in the Writing Process

*Adapted from Dr. Joe Bizup*

*What is it?*

A Says/Does analysis asks you to write a single sentence describing what each paragraph of an essay **says** and a single sentence describing what it **does**.

Says

For the “says” part, write a single sentence that fully summarizes the “main point” of the paragraph. Ideally, this will be the topic sentence of the paragraph. Consider the examples below from three different paragraphs in “Masters of Desire” by Jack Solomon:

“Advertisers have been quick to exploit the status symbols that belong to body language as well” (404).

“Gitlin points out that such images cater to the fantasies of faceless corporate men who dream of entrepreneurial glory” (409).

“When so much power and prestige is being given to high-tech machines, wouldn’t you rather be a Porsche?” (409).

Does

For the “does” part, write a single sentence that describes what a paragraph is doing in terms of PAS (presenting/analyzing/synthesizing) and what it is PAS-ing (an exhibit, idea, argument, theory, etc.). Consider the same examples from above:

Solomon **analyzes** the body language of the actors in a Cadillac commercial.

Solomon **presents** Gitlin’s theory about commercials featuring high-tech machinery.

Solomon **complicates** Gitlin’s theory about commercials featuring high-tech machinery by considering other contemporary trends.

How do you use Says-Does analysis to improve your writing?

This is primarily a paragraphing tool (but it can also help you section an essay).

If two paragraphs “say” the same thing (even if they “do” different things), then one of those paragraphs can usually go.

If it is hard to determine the “main point” of a paragraph, then your paragraph might be saying too many things and you will need to separate your ideas into multiple paragraphs. Alternatively, the problem may be that you have no explicit topic sentence; thus, you need to write one into the paragraph.

If a paragraph contains information unrelated to its “main point,” then you need to cut extraneous information and refocus the paragraph.

If two consecutive paragraphs “do” the same thing (with the same source), then you should probably think about condensing and combining them into a single paragraph.

If it is hard to figure out whether a paragraph is P, A, or S, then you should consider breaking up the content of the paragraph by job/function.

If it’s hard to figure out how the source in the paragraph is being used (as context, exhibit, argument, or theory), then you need to figure it out and make sure your intended use of the source is clear to both you and your reader.

If you find that you are presenting for more than two paragraphs in a row, then you need to add a paragraph of analysis. If you have more than two analysis paragraphs in a row, then you should think adding a paragraph of synthesis.

When do you use it?

Use the Says/Does analysis on exploratory drafts to help identify potential ideas that can form the basis of future paragraphs.

Use the Says/Does analysis on ALL non-exploratory drafts (in your other classes too). For this class it’s obvious that you need presentation (of sources), for example, but check your essays for other courses with Says/Does and you may find yourself rather light on presentation. It is ALWAYS necessary. This technique can help you make sure you have included all of the elements a reader needs to understand the content of your essay.

You can also use this as a reading strategy, especially to improve your understanding of difficult texts.