

Paragraph vs. Essay

What's the difference between a paragraph and an essay?

A paragraph is a few sentences (usually 5 or so) put together about a single topic. The first sentence in a paragraph is usually the topic sentence. The topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph. It tells the reader what the paragraph is about or its main idea. The topic sentence has two parts: the **topic** and the **controlling idea**. The **topic** is the subject of your paragraph; it is what you are writing about. The **controlling idea** limits or controls your topic to the one aspect that you want to write about.

Example:

Rice plays an important part in some ceremonies.
(topic) (controlling idea)

Rice is a nutritious part of our diet.
(topic) (controlling idea)

A topic can have more than one controlling idea. If you want to expand your topic and talk about more than one controlling idea, you will need to write an essay. In an essay about rice, you could write one paragraph about how rice plays an important part in some ceremonies, a second paragraph about how rice is a nutritious part of our diet, and a third paragraph about another aspect of rice. If you are writing multiple paragraphs about a topic, you have an essay. (From Weaving It Together Book 2, pp. 35-36)

An essay is a piece of writing that is several paragraphs long. An essay, just like a paragraph, is about one topic. Since the topic is broad, the essay is divided into paragraphs, one for each major point. To tie all the parts together, an introduction is added to the beginning and a conclusion to the end.

An essay has three parts:

1. An introduction
2. A body (one or more paragraphs)
3. A conclusion

Here is some information about each part of an essay.

INTRODUCTION: The introduction has two parts: **general statements** and a **thesis statement**. The **general statements** give the reader background information about the essay topic. These statements should get the reader interested in the topic. The **thesis statement** introduces the main idea of the essay. It is just like a topic sentence in a paragraph. It states the main topic

and tells what will be said in the body paragraphs. The thesis is usually the last sentence of the introduction.

BODY: The **body** of an essay consists of one or more paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs has a topic sentence, supporting sentences (with examples and details), and sometimes a concluding sentence. The body paragraphs support whatever is stated in the thesis statement. The body paragraphs are similar to the supporting sentences of a paragraph.

CONCLUSION: The conclusion is the last paragraph of the essay. It summarizes the main points discussed in the body paragraphs or restates the thesis in different words. It should also leave the reader with a final comment or thought about the topic.

Look at the following diagram of a paragraph and an essay. Note how the parts of an essay match the parts of a paragraph.

