

ABOUT PARAGRAPHS:

Paragraphs contain THREE BASIC COMPONENTS

1. TOPIC SENTENCE or CLAIM
2. CONCRETE DETAIL or DATA
3. COMMENTARY or WARRANT

TOPIC SENTENCE [TPS aka the "CLAIM"]

Usually, the first sentence in a BODY PARAGRAPH. It should introduce the topic of the paragraph and relate directly back to the THESIS. (or, in a longer essay, relate it directly back to the TPS of the preceding paragraph.) Imagine someone asking you, "How do you want me to think about your topic now?"

CONCRETE DETAIL [CD aka the "DATA"]:

This is the specific information you offer as the EVIDENCE for your topic; it will be the core of your paragraph. Imagine someone asking you, "Can you show me what you mean?" Other names for CONCRETE DETAIL: illustrations, examples, descriptions, quotations, paraphrasing, plot evidence.

During DRAFTING you may rely upon PHRASES like "FOR EXAMPLE" to introduce CONCRETE DETAIL--this is the kind of thing to eliminate during REVISION

In the literature essay, CD is often a DIRECT QUOTATION.

COMMENTARY [CM aka the "WARRANT"]:

This is your explanation for offering the concrete detail you select--that is, your comment on, discussion about, or evaluation of the evidence (CD) offered. Imagine someone asking you, "What exactly does your concrete detail prove?" You want to suggest how your CD is both relevant and unique. Other names for COMMENTARY include: insight, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, response, explication, reflection.

A hint for getting started on COMMENTARY: begin with the phrase : THIS SHOWS THAT . . . This is the kind of thing to eliminate during REVISION

Once you understand the different components of a paragraph, you can choose to MOVE BEYOND THE TEMPLATE. Some students depart from the FORMAT, some never do.

This whole discussion is based on Toulmin's Model . Here's a little bit more about it.

The model is a six-step system of argument:

- (1) a CLAIM is made;
- (2) DATA (also called "GROUNDS"), i.e., facts to support it, are offered;
- (3) a WARRANT for connecting the data/grounds to the claim is conveyed

In addition, Toulmin adds

- (4) BACKING, the theoretical or experimental foundations for the warrant, is shown (at least implicitly);
- (5) appropriate MODAL QUALIFIERS (some, many, most, etc.) temper the claim; and
- (6) possible REBUTTALS are considered.

But, for now, let us focus on the first three (and add a concluding sentence).

CLAIM

A claim is a statement that you are asking the other person to accept. This includes information you are asking them to accept as true (exposition) or actions you want them to accept and enact (persuasion).

Many people start with a claim, but then find that it is challenged. If you just ask me to do something, I will not simply agree with what you want. I will ask why I should agree with you. I will ask you to prove your claim. This is where grounds of data become important.

DATA

Data is the basis of real persuasion and is made up of information and hard facts. It is the truth on which the claim is based. The actual truth of the data may be less than 100%, as all data is based on perception and hence has some element of assumption about it. You want your data to be convincing enough that it is not challenged. To make it convincing, you need to explain it clearly to your readers.

Data is usually a very powerful element of persuasion, although it does affect people differently. Those who are logical or rational will more likely be persuaded by data. Those who argue emotionally and who are highly invested in their own position will challenge it or otherwise try to ignore it. This is where the warrant comes into play.

WARRANT

A warrant links data to a claim, legitimizing the claim by showing the data to be relevant. The warrant should be made explicit. It answers the question "Why does that data mean your claim is true?" The warrant may be simple and it may also be a longer argument with additional sub-elements, including those described below.

SAMPLE ESSAY

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

When Billy Joel sings about being in a "New York State of Mind," there are plenty of people who have some choice words for that "state." They aren't always nice words. Many people have the notion that New Yorkers are rude. New Yorkers are focused; they have places to go, people to meet, and things to do. They're plain busy.

TOPIC SENTENCE

It takes **time** being *nice*. **Time**, however, is something most busy New Yorkers do not have.

EVIDENCE (OR CONCRETE DETAIL)

There is little for **Time** *niceties* when one is focused on the task of going, meeting, and doing. For example, ask a New Yorker for information and they give it.

EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE (COMMENTARY)

¹Some people think that when they get a direct answer without any additional pleasantries, the respondent is rude. ²There is no time for "how are you today," no "looks like rain." The question is asked; the question is answered.

EVIDENCE (CD)

[In addition,] living in a city of nine million people demands the swift pace that is characteristic of New York. In the hustle and bustle of city life, New Yorkers often depend on others to get where the need to go. They ride the subway or busses, take taxis, or "hoof it."

EVALUATION (CM)

¹For people who like to have control, it can be disturbing to depend on someone else. So, New Yorkers take precautions. Moving quickly, bumping, and jostling on the street are the risks of living a fast-paced life. ²People do not always apologize. They simply nod, shrug their shoulders, or mutter, "Sorry." Often, the apology between New Yorkers is unspoken. It is understood: "no biggie."

CONCLUSION

Even when they are relaxing, New Yorkers are intent on the task at hand. At a baseball game, their job is to cheer the team to victory. When eating a hot dog on the street, the task is to avoid wearing the mustard. At Bloomingdales, the mission is to find it, purchase it, get out. Window shopping, carriage rides through Central Park, lazy lunches at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel--these are activities for tourists. New Yorkers have no time for these indulgences. They have something to do--now.