

What Are the Types of Paragraphs?

There are four different types of paragraphs.

Narrative	used to tell a story or a sequence of events
Descriptive	used to describe a scene or an object
Expository	used to provide information, including facts, instructions, and definitions
Persuasive	used to share opinions and convince others to agree or take action

The type of paragraph you use will depend on your *purpose for writing*. To **entertain** readers or **express** themselves, writers use narration or description. Exposition and narration are used to **inform** readers about something. Writers use persuasion to **influence** people. Several paragraphs written about the same subject might be very different, depending on why the writers wrote them. The four paragraphs that follow all talk about roller coasters, but in different ways.

Narrative paragraphs tell about an event or series of events, usually in chronological order. Most short stories and newspaper articles are examples of narrative writing.

Reference Note

For more information and practice on **chronological order**, see page 297.

Your knuckles are white, your palms are drenched, and it feels like your dentist has just switched on the drill. Worse still, as the click of the chain pulls the train skyward, you glance back at the gum-chewing guy who strapped you in and wonder what possessed you to put your life in the hands of a kid you wouldn't trust to wrap your sandwich. That's when you realize: This is all a big mistake. Only now you're at the top, staring into the air, the track seems to have vanished, and the car teeters on the edge of nothingness. Then gravity takes hold and whoooooaa . . . you're hurtling

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earthward. Faster, faster. Suddenly you're upside down, spinning around corners, praying for it all to end. Minutes later the shoulder bar rises, you stagger out on wobbly knees . . . and hey, where's that kid? Maybe he'll let us ride up front this time.

Anne-Marie O'Neill, "On a Roll," *People Weekly*

Descriptive paragraphs do exactly what you think they do; they describe a person, an object, or a scene in detail.

Rising ominously from the frozen Muskegon landscape, it is a sight both exhilarating and unnerving, this man-made mountain range of wood. Under a cold grey sky, the soul of this creation waits in silent hibernation for the warmth of spring. Then, when the clouds part, the snows melt, and the earth awakens, *it shall be silent no more*. A gorgeous, textbook example of the classic "out-and-back" roller coaster, Shivering Timbers will be Michigan's largest coaster. Even more, this humongous lumber wonder will rank as the third longest wooden coaster in the United States.

"1998 Preview," Thrillride! Web site

Expository paragraphs are used for explanation. They can list facts, give directions, or explain ideas. Writers also use expository paragraphs to define terms, make comparisons, and show cause and effect. Since information in expository writing can usually be put into categories, it often uses logical order.

In the Nickel Empire, attractions grew bigger, faster, weirder: horses diving from platforms; "guess men" who guessed your weight, age, occupation; clowns with cattle prods who mildly shocked innocent bystanders. Every amusement park had its Ferris wheel, but only Coney Island

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Reference Note

For more information and practice on **spatial order**, see page 300.

Reference Note

For more information and practice on **logical order**, see page 301.



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had the Wonder Wheel, with cages that rocked and slid along tracks inside the 135-foot disk. In 1920 the Wonder Wheel replaced the Statue of Liberty as the first sight immigrants saw as they sailed into New York Harbor. Pumping up the adrenaline, Coney's showmen built roller coasters with hair-raising names like the Tornado, the Thunderbolt, and in 1927, the Cyclone. With its 60-mile-per-hour plunge, the Cyclone soon drew lines five hours long. Charles Lindbergh has been quoted as calling the coaster "a greater thrill than flying an airplane at top speed."

Bruce Watson, "Three's a Crowd, They Say, But Not at Coney Island!" *Smithsonian*

Persuasive paragraphs are used to share an opinion about a particular subject. Writers of persuasive paragraphs try to convince readers to agree with the opinions in the paragraphs and, sometimes, to take action. A persuasive paragraph often uses *order of importance*.

Reference Note

For more on **order of importance**, see page 218.

Going on amusement park rides is one of the safest forms of recreation. According to the International Association of Amusement Park Attractions, you are more likely to be injured when you play sports, ride a horse, or even ride a bicycle. Statistics show the occurrence of death to be approximately one in 250 million riders. This group's statistics are supported by those of the National Consumer Product Safety Commission. It estimates that more than 270 million people visit amusement parks each year, and that 7,000 people out of those 270 million go to emergency rooms for injuries they receive on amusement park rides—that's only 0.00259 percent of riders.

"Amusement Park Physics," *Learner on Line* Web site

Exercise 11 Identifying Types of Paragraphs

With two or three other students, find an example of each of the four paragraph types in magazines, newspapers, books, or on Web sites. Then, answer the following questions for each paragraph.

1. Do you think the paragraph is narrative, descriptive, expository, or persuasive? How can you tell?
2. How are the details organized in each paragraph (chronologically, spatially, logically)? How do you know? Could the information have been organized in a different way? How?
3. What was the writer's purpose for writing each piece (to entertain, inform, influence, express)? Does your group feel that the writer achieved his or her purpose? Why?

How Are Paragraphs Used in Longer Pieces of Writing?

So far, you have had practice with paragraphs that can stand on their own or are part of the body of a longer piece of writing. There are two other kinds of paragraphs you will need to use in your writing: *introduction* and *conclusion* paragraphs. The body paragraphs in a composition are like the supporting details in a paragraph—they serve as the filling for your “idea sandwich.” Introduction and conclusion paragraphs are the bread for that sandwich. They are like larger versions of your topic and clincher sentences.

Dividing a Piece into Paragraphs

When you write a longer piece, you need to divide the body into paragraphs to give your readers' eyes a rest and to switch to a new main idea. To help your readers understand changes in a longer piece of writing, start a new paragraph when

- you express a new or different main idea
- you explain another part of your subject or step in a process
- you provide another kind of support for your opinion
- the setting—time or location—of your piece changes
- a different person or character speaks

Reference Note

For more on **introductions** and **conclusions**, see “Writing” in the Quick Reference Handbook.