Paragraphing

Paragraphs are crucial in academic writing. Each one should focus on only one point, theme or topic. This main point should be developed and supported and it should link to the overall theme or main point of the piece of writing.

Paragraphs help you, the writer, to organise your ideas and they also help the reader to find the main points in your text. ‘Leaky’ paragraphs, which slip from one theme to another within the same paragraph, confuse the reader, because we become unsure what the central point is and therefore how it fits into the overall argument and structure.

One way to test your paragraph’s ‘unity’ is to try to write a mini-heading for it (which you can remove later). It is very hard to write a short heading for a leaky paragraph. Another way is to ask a friend to read the paragraph and tell you what they think it is about. If they can see the main point, then you probably have a well-focussed paragraph. If you know you have trouble ‘controlling’ your paragraphing, try to include a topic sentence at the beginning of each one so that you don’t forget what you are focussing on.

If you find that your paragraphs are very short, you are probably not developing the points fully. One way to deal with this is to see whether you can combine some of the paragraphs together, then add an overarching ‘umbrella’ sentence to make sure the reader sees the connection: e.g. ‘There are a number of factors involved in the adoption of new technologies …’. On the other hand, it may be that you need to develop each of the short paragraphs into something more substantial by including more discussion and/or evidence to support the central point you are making.

If you are in doubt as to how to construct a paragraph, try starting with a ‘topic sentence’ which expresses the main idea and shows how it links logically to the previous paragraph. Then write ‘supporting sentences’ which expand the main idea by using evidence, examples or argument.

For more guidance, see https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/ (From the Purdue University Online Writing Lab at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu).