

AREAS: How to Write a Persuasive Paragraph

A common question students ask is, “what needs to be included in a paragraph and how long does it have to be?” This document is designed to answer that question. Every paragraph must include the following five (5) components and the length depends on how many sentences are necessary to argue effectively:

Components to a paragraph: AREAS				
A: ARGUMENT	R: REASON	E: EVIDENCE	A: ANALYSIS	S: SUMMATION

A: ARGUMENT: The purpose of any persuasive paper and each of its paragraphs is to argue why a particular idea or point of view is correct. The “argument” in this context is the response to the question – it is the idea that the author wants the reader to accept. In order to clearly outline to the reader the argument being articulated, the argument must begin every paragraph.

For this example, pretend that the question on an assignment was as follows: “Should freedom of speech always be defended?”

In this case, there are two possible arguments:

<i>Freedom of speech should always be defended</i>	Freedom of speech should not always be defended
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Taking the positive side of the argument, the first part of a thesis or introductory paragraph would start with the phrase:

- Freedom of speech should always be defended

R: REASON*: Next, it is essential to articulate “why” the argument is correct. The idea that supports the argument is known as the reason. Arguments need to be outlined and explained for people to believe them. Before presenting the specific evidence, it is key for the author to tell the reader why she is right by using forceful and logical language so that the reader will understand the argument. The reason is what most clearly distinguishes a persuasive paragraph from an expository paragraph. The purpose of an expository paragraph is to explain information – to explain the “what.” In contrast, the purpose of a persuasive paragraph is to explain why an argument is correct – to explain the “why.” The reason, then, articulates the “why” so the reader can understand the validity of the argument.

There are infinite possibilities for reasons. The process of choosing a reason to argue should be guided by the available evidence as a reason that is not supported is not especially convincing. Here are some possible reasons that support this argument about freedom of speech:

It is a right guaranteed in the Constitution	It leads to innovation	It encourages participation in society
It makes people happier	<i>It empowers citizens in a democracy</i>	It prevents government repression

Focusing on how freedom of speech and democracy are related, the second part of an introductory paragraph would end with the phrase:

“It empowers citizens in a democracy”

The first sentence to any persuasive paragraph must contain the argument and the reason. Think of it as an equation:

Introductory sentence: ARGUMENT + REASON

In this equation, the plus sign needs to be a word that implies some type of logical connection, such as “because,” “on account of,” “as a result of,” “due to,” and “owing to.” Here, then, is an introductory sentence in response to the question, “should freedom of speech always be defended?”

Introductory Sentence: “Freedom of speech should always be defended because it empowers citizens in a democracy”

* It is critical to realize that the reason and evidence are not the same. A reason is a logical statement on why the argument is correct while evidence is data, examples, and/or facts that support the argument and reason.

E: EVIDENCE: The only way a reader will trust an argument is if the author provides evidence. Otherwise, the reader doesn't know if the argument has any bearing in the real world. The best evidence is quotations, examples, and/or facts that directly relate to the argument and the specific reason articulated in the introductory sentence. Here are some examples that would support the idea that "Freedom of speech should always be defended because it empowers citizens in a democracy."

A quotation from a US Supreme Court Justice from a case in which freedom of political speech was protected	A quotation from the first amendment to the Bill of Rights	An explanation of how debate among citizens enhanced the democratic process during the 2012 elections
<i>An explanation of how an increase in freedom of speech led to a democratic government in Egypt in 2011</i>	<i>A quotation by a activist for free speech in Egypt in 2011</i>	A quotation from a member of Congress about how open debate is necessary for a democracy to function

Here is how two pieces of evidence can be combined into an effective evidence section:

"The experiences of people in Egypt under the Mubarak regime show how limitations on freedom of speech destroy democracy. Mubarak, the f leader of Egypt until 2011 and a former general, came to power when his predecessor was assassinated in 1978. He immediately claimed that he needed 'emergency powers' in order to ensure peace and security. In the 1980s, he shut down several, pro-democracy newspapers, including *The Truth* and *Democracy Now!* According to the former editor of *The Truth*, 'Democracy exists in Egypt in name only. We are slaves to a dictator and are unable to speak our minds' (Griffin 34). Over the course of his reign, nearly 10,000 people were imprisoned by the country's secret police. In this environment, democratic reforms proved impossible."

A: ANALYSIS: Evidence does not speak for itself. It is not enough though just to explain a period or event; instead, the evidence must be used to explain how it backs up your overall argument. Without elaboration, the reader will be unsure how the evidence relates to your argument. It is necessary to explain why the evidence proves the reason as clearly and logically as possible, rather than speak in generalizations. Forceful, argumentative words, such as "because," "therefore," and "as a result," in order to strengthen the tone of the analysis.

"The fact that Egyptian citizens have no say in their government because their speech is limited shows how important this freedom is for preserving a function democracy. People need to be able to speak their minds for a democracy to work. Without freedom of speech, a democracy cannot function because the government will have no way of knowing what the people think. The lack of speech allowed a dictator, Mubarak, to dominate Egyptian politics and society for generations, demonstrating what can happen when speech is limited."

S: SUMMATION: The purpose of a concluding sentence is to restate the argument and reason in order to remind the reader how the evidence, analysis, argument, and reason all fit together into a coherent whole. In order to avoid repetition, the structure of the sentence should be different than the introductory sentence. Think of it as an equation:

Concluding sentence: ARGUMENT + REASON (rephrased)

Just like for the introductory paragraph, the plus sign in this equation needs to be a word that implies some type of logical connection, such as "because," "on account of," "as a result of," "due to," and "owing to." Here, then, is an appropriate concluding sentence:

"Therefore, freedom of speech must be defended in order to protect democracies"

AREAS: The answer to the question at the top of this sheet, then, is that a paragraph must contain the five components explained above and a paragraph's length depends on how many sentences are needed to accomplish this task. Think of it as an equation:

Paragraph: ARGUMENT + REASONS + EVIDENCE + ANALYSIS + SUMMATION

Freedom of speech should always be defended because it empowers citizens in a democracy. The experiences of people in Egypt under the Mubarak regime show how limitations on freedom of speech destroy democracy. Mubarak, the f leader of Egypt until 2011 and a former general, came to power when his predecessor was assassinated in 1978. He immediately claimed that he needed 'emergency powers' in order to ensure peace and security. In the 1980s, he shut down several, pro-democracy newspapers, including *The Truth* and *Democracy Now!* According to the former editor of *The Truth*, 'Democracy exists in Egypt in name only. We are slaves to a dictator and are unable to speak our minds' (Griffin 34). Over the course of his reign, nearly 10,000 people were imprisoned by the country's secret police. In this environment, democratic reforms proved impossible. The fact that Egyptian citizens have no say in their government because their speech is limited shows how important this freedom is for preserving a function democracy. People need to be able to speak their minds for a democracy to work. Without freedom of speech, a democracy cannot function because the government will have no way of knowing what the people think. The lack of speech allowed a dictator, Mubarak, to dominate Egyptian politics and society for generations, demonstrating what can happen when speech is limited. Therefore, freedom of speech must be defended in order to protect democracies.