

# Functional Skills

## English

Level 2 Writing W4b

Use Paragraphs to Organise Written Communication v1.0

**Functional Skills English:**

Level 2

**Skill Standard:**

Writing W4b

**Coverage and Range:**

Use paragraphs to effectively organise written communication.

'Learners should use format and structure appropriately for different types of documents, allowing readers to follow the main points communicated progressively or in a logical sequence. Features such as headings, sub-headings and paragraphs should be used effectively.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> QCA Functional Skills guidance: amplification of the standards June 2008 QCA/08/3700

## Paragraphs

Formed from one or multiple sentences that deal with a related subject, paragraphs are one of the crucial building blocks of written English. Once you move on to a wholly different speaker, topic, place or time, a new paragraph should be started. Paragraphs are therefore used to help organise and structure many forms of writing, and are considered essential to formal pieces such as letters, essays and articles.

### Structure

Whilst there is no specified upper limit, the shortest paragraphs can be a mere one line long. Paragraphs should also be separated from one another in one of two ways.

1. Indentation – whereby the first line of each is pushed slightly to the right:

*Early in the day Dorothea had returned from the infant school which she had set going in the village, and was taking her usual place in the pretty sitting-room which divided the bedrooms of the sisters, bent on finishing a plan for some buildings (a kind of work which she delighted in), when Celia, who had been watching her with a hesitating desire to propose something, said –*

*“Dorothea, dear, if you don't mind – if you are not very busy – suppose we looked at mamma's jewels to-day, and divided them? It is exactly six months to-day since uncle gave them to you, and you have not looked at them yet.”*

*Celia's face had the shadow of a pouting expression in it, the full presence of the pout being kept back by an habitual awe of Dorothea and principle; two associated facts which might show a mysterious electricity if you touched them incautiously. To her relief, Dorothea's eyes were full of laughter as she looked up.*

*“What a wonderful little almanac you are, Celia! Is it six calendar or six lunar months?”*

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

2. Line omission – by which a single line space is left between each:

*In the last ten years alone, cycling has trebled. Motor traffic has dropped by one fifth, and cyclists now make up 24 per cent of central London traffic in the morning peak.*

*We are becoming at last a true cycling city; and that is why we need to do more to help, and to do it fast.*

*We want the world on their bike: not just chiselled whippets in lycra. We want a cycling environment that is equally welcoming to women, to families, to pin-striped captains of industry wobbling gently along – the kind of cycle-friendly environment you see in Copenhagen or Amsterdam.*

Boris Johnson, as quoted in *The Times*

## Goldilocks

Similar to the porridge in the fairy tale, your paragraphs should be neither too long nor too short. When learning to use them, a suggested length of between three and five sentences is deemed appropriate. As you get more experienced, of course, you will naturally develop your paragraphs as you wish. When you proofread your own writing to begin with, though, you might find that some of your paragraphs are too brief, whilst others are overly ponderous. In such cases it might be better to consider adding more detail to the former or appending it to a neighbouring paragraph, and splitting the latter up.

## Key Points

- Focus:** Every paragraph should be concerned with a single idea. If you have a longer idea which covers multiple paragraphs, though, separate each point within that idea into a paragraph of its own.
- Contrast:** If you are writing a piece in which you are comparing ideas or claims, it can make sense to place each contrasting point within a separate paragraph.
- Coherence:** Every paragraph should be composed of logically interconnected sentences which together make sense as a group. If you find that you are waffling, it might be because you've moved onto a new point without a new paragraph.
- Cascade:** All your points – be they sentences, paragraphs or chapters – should flow smoothly to create a cascade of meaning that runs throughout your work. Transitions can be the key to this (see below).
- Openings:** The opening sentence of each paragraph is often used to introduce the reader to the idea(s) that will be covered in the rest of that particular passage. Naturally, not all paragraphs have such an explicit *topic sentence*, and even in those that do it does not always appear first. When learning to format your writing in paragraphs, however, it can help you to follow such a pattern. A good topic sentence should state the overall point(s) you wish to make in that paragraph, with the specifics being provided by the remaining sentences.
- Detail:** Aside from your own thoughts, opinions and comments, you will frequently find that you are called upon to include various other details within paragraphs in order to justify your claims. To ensure that you cover sufficient ground to make your paragraph coherent, remember to try and make use of examples, facts, quotes, statistics, etc.
- Planning:** Pre-planning your work can make creating paragraphs much easier to do. If you have on paper a route through your argument, reinforced with links to suitable evidence, you are far more likely to be able to produce a good piece of work than if you dived in head first and just started writing.

## Transitions

In order to make your writing flow smoothly and work as a single piece, you can use *transitions* to connect your sentences and paragraphs together. Transitions are words and phrases which show the reader how your entire text works as one cohesive case, with each successive point building on the last in order to produce a coherent argument.

Put simply, where one paragraph ends, the next should begin. Don't make your writing stilted and predictable by overusing them, though; instead, think logically and plan your points carefully.

**To add detail:** also, and, additionally, again, besides, equally, further(more), too, moreover.

**To compare:** after, against, although, besides, but, by comparison, contrary to, in contrast, conversely, however, meanwhile, nevertheless, whereas, yet.

**For exceptions:** despite, however, in spite of, nonetheless, sometimes, still, while, yet.

**For proof/  
examples:** because, consequently, evidently, for (example/instance), for the reason(s), in this case, indeed, obviously, on this occasion, that, therefore, to demonstrate/illustrate, since.

**To show time/  
for order:** after(wards), before, finally, first, following, formerly, hence(forth), immediately, imminently, later, next, now, previously, soon, then, thereafter, second(ly), simultaneously, soon, subsequently, then, third(ly), thus.

**For emphasis:** absolutely, always, certainly, definitely, emphatically, extremely, indeed, naturally, never, obviously, perennially, positively, undeniably, unquestionably, without (a) doubt.

**To conclude:** accordingly, consequently, hence, in conclusion, on the whole, therefore, thus, to conclude, to sum up.

## Example

### Financial Update

Milky brews and budget rooms have **continued** to be a winning combination for leisure giant bksb Ltd., which **today revealed** a 12 percent rise in profits to £87m for the first six months of this financial year.

**Amazingly**, records show that the owner of the *Tea4Me* range of beverage shops and the *Big Night Out* hotel chain has **recorded** a double digit jump in sales for the thirty-fifth month in a row, **even as** it prepares to launch into India.

bksb, which **also** owns the *Jason's Choice* restaurant chain and the *Harry & George's* ice cream brand, **furthermore announced** it would raise its interim dividend by 8 percent to 12 pence per share.

The company, which is a partly-owned subsidiary of the US-based Edsel Corporation, **hit the headlines earlier** this month with an aggressive expansion plan that would see it enter the competitive Asian market in the next quarter.

Lauren Miles, bksb's chief operating officer, **emphatically stated** that British customers were, "beating down the doors," and that, "Tea4Me is clearly the UK's number one hot drinks outlet, with particular growth seen in the under 25s market."

In a recent broker briefing, Ms Miles was **additionally** seen to welcome on board Sandeep Multani, the flamboyant Indian millionaire and former Bollywood star, as a non-executive director of bksb. "Mr Multani has the skills and contacts to make bksb the leader in his home country," she was quoted as saying. "With a billion thirsty people to cater for, we're confident of replicating our success in the biggest tea-drinking market in the world."

## Exercise 1

In the following formal letter there are no paragraphs whatsoever, and at a glance you can see how difficult it is to read and make sense of. For thousands of years no one thought to use paragraphs, so we are lucky that writing today is formatted to make it easily understandable.

In the text below, highlight the 7 words that should begin new paragraphs (and don't overlook the very obvious first one).

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, I am writing to you to apply for the clerical officer's job that I saw advertised on your website. Should I be successful, this post would enhance my career prospects and offer me both challenges and opportunities that are not available in my current role. I believe that I would be well suited to this position thanks to my background and qualifications. I have, for example, six years' experience in similar roles, through which I have learned to take minutes, file correspondence, touch type up to 60 words per minute, and follow data protection regulations, all of which are mentioned in the job description. Furthermore, I have just completed my Functional Skills Level 2 qualifications in maths and English, which together have improved both my knowledge and confidence. Alongside them, I also hold a Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Business and Administration and eight GCSEs (AABBCCC). Please find attached my CV which contains further details about my employment history and education, in addition to the contact details of two suitable referees. May I thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you. Yours sincerely/faithfully, \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 2

In the following extract from the children's classic *Black Beauty*, there are no paragraphs whatsoever, and again you can see how difficult it is to read. Your task is to mark where you feel that new paragraphs should begin. Including the obvious first one, there are five paragraphs in total, and the whole piece is written from the point of view of the foal herself.

The first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some shady trees leaned over it, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a ploughed field, and on the other we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside; at the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank. While I was young I lived upon my mother's milk, as I could not eat grass. In the daytime I ran by her side, and at night I lay down close by her. When it was hot we used to stand by the pond in the shade of the trees, and when it was cold we had a nice warm shed near the grove. As soon as I was old enough to eat grass my mother used to go out to work in the daytime, and come back in the evening. There were six young colts in the meadow besides me; they were older than I was; some were nearly as large as grown-up horses. I used to run with them, and had great fun; we used to gallop all together round and round the field as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough play, for they would frequently bite and kick as well as gallop. One day, when there was a good deal of kicking, my mother whinnied to me to come to her, and then she said: "I wish you to pay attention to what I am going to say to you."



