

TRIAC Paragraph Structure

Emerging academic writers often wonder how to beef up their paragraphs without adding fluff. TRIAC can help writers explain their ideas in depth. TRIAC paragraphs (or paragraph sequences) feature these elements:

Topic. Start the paragraph by introducing a topic that supports or complicates your thesis – the central problem or idea that the paragraph aims to explore. Better topic sentences function as a mini-thesis and make a claim about the topic.

Restriction. Because there can be many aspects and approaches to a topic, it makes sense to specify the aspect or approach you’re going to take. Follow the topic with sentences that narrow the scope of the topic. In these sentences, you’re rewriting the topic in more specific terms and setting the direction the paragraph will follow.

Illustration. Help your reader understand the restricted topic in concrete terms, and give him or her something to think about by offering an example, exhibit, or evidence.

Analysis. Help your reader see your point by looking at the evidence you offered through your eyes. What parts of it are the most significant? How does the evidence support, complicate, or counter the restricted claim about the topic you (or another writer) are making?

Conclusion/Connections. What, having understood your evidence as you see it, should your reader have learned from your paragraph? How can this conclusion be connected to other relevant ideas in your essay?

Here’s an example of a short TRIAC paragraph.

[TOPIC] *Many pundits worry that the way we use the Internet is reshaping our minds.*
[RESTRICTION] *The biggest concerns are that our link-hopping, shallow-reading habits are fostering inattention and undermining literacy.* **[ILLUSTRATION]** *For example, in “Is Google Making Us Stupid?,” journalist Nicholas Carr worries that the connection-making contemplative state of mind promoted by slow, deep reading is giving way to an efficiency-seeking state of mind best adapted to finding separate bits of information.* **[ANALYSIS]** *Carr’s view rightly points out that our reading habits are certainly changing along with the intellectual technologies we most use. It is true that much of our everyday reading feeds our information seeking appetites. It is also true that it takes work to learn how to read and think slowly and deeply. But his insistence that we are losing our ability to think in a complex way is belied by the slow patient contemplative thinking that takes place in activities such as prayer, meditation, and scholarship.* **[CONCLUSION]** *While it may indeed take conscious and disciplined effort to learn how to read and think well, today’s students are capable of making that effort, provided that we recognize that, like previous generations, some may need guided practice in the habit.*

