**Hints for Writing Effective Paragraphs of Literary Analysis**Source: <http://cai.ucdavis.edu/uccp/paragraphing.html>

Well-organized paragraphs have four components that work together to produce a coherent, unified product.  Think of each paragraph as a mini-essay endeavoring to prove one aspect of your thesis statement.  That is, each paragraph should

* make a debatable claim (the topic sentence)
* provide proof for that claim (the evidence or support)
* show how the evidence supports the claim (the analysis)
* contain effective transitions both within the paragraph and between paragraphs so that the reader can follow the logic of the argument (transitions).

Let's break these components down and define each one.   **Topic sentence:** The topic sentence is to the paragraph what the thesis is to the entire paper. That is, a paragraph's topic sentence states the claim or argument of that paragraph.  The topic sentence usually asserts a claim that will support one part of the paper's larger thesis.  For example, imagine we are writing a comparison and contrast essay of Maude from *Harold and Maude* and Mrs. Robinson from *The Graduate*. This could be the topic sentence for our first supporting paragraph:

The first and most telling difference between Maude and Mrs. Robinson is in each couples’ view and treatment of sex. Whereas Harold and Maude have sex as an expression of their love for one another, Ben and Mrs. Robinson have sex even though they don’t seem to know or even like one another.

Notice that, like a thesis, a topic sentence can be more than one sentence if necessary.

**Evidence:**    Support or evidence usually refers to quotations from or summary of the literary work.  Without support, your topic sentence will go unproven and your paragraph will fall flat.  (If your topic sentence does not seem to require support, it probably isn't an effective topic sentence to begin with).   Working with the topic sentence above, we might use the following three pieces of evidence:

1. Harold and Maude do not have sex until they have professed their love for one another.
2. The argument between Ben and Mrs. Robinson when they try to have a real conversation.
3. Mrs. Robinson’s use of their sexual relationship to prevent Ben from seeing Elaine.

**Analysis:** Withanalysis, you tell your reader how you want him or her to understand the quotation or summary you have provided as support.  As a writer, you can't necessarily assume that your reader will draw the same conclusions you have drawn from the evidence.  Some might interpret your evidence differently and if that interpretation doesn't work for your argument your paper falls apart. So you need to elaborate, through your analysis, on your own interpretation.  Thus, support and analysis go hand in hand.

Here's an example of some analysis following the support cited above.  The ***italicized*** sentences are primarily analytical, while the **underlined** ones convey the evidence itself:

*When Maude and Harold begin their relationship, sex could not be further from either of their minds. It is only after an extended courtship that involves numerous dates and the sharing of intimate life details that the idea of a physical relationship even begins to creep in.* When they do finally have sex, it is only after Harold confesses his love for Maude with an engraved coin that reads, “Harold loves Maude.” To which, she responds, “and Maude loves Harold.” This reciprocal love is made physical later that night and it is a beautiful and moving experience for both of them*. Even though many in society would judge and condemn their acts, they feel no shame and do not wish to hide their genuine love for one another. It’s just this type of judgement that motivates Ben and Mrs. Robinson to keep their relationship hidden, especially since it does not come from a place of sincere love or even affection. It is simply a physical act between two lonely, depressed and alienated individuals.* When Ben tries to make it about more than just sex one night and “have a conversation” with Mrs. Robinson, it ends in a fight with Ben declaring that he is “not proud” of his affair “with a broken-down alcoholic.” Conversely, Mrs. Robinson uses their sexual relationship as a weapon, attempting to blackmail Ben to keep him away from her daughter, Elaine. *If either Ben or Mrs. Robinson truly had an affinity for one another, they would not have treated each other with such hostility and disdain. In the end, for this couple, sex was nothing more than a way to pass their days. Whom they were passing their days with, didn’t matter to either of them.*

**Transitions**:  Well organized paragraphs use transitions between the topic sentence, support, and analysis which let the reader know where the argument is going.  Simple transitions such as "for example," "for instance," "therefore," "however," and "also" are useful to show relationships between ideas. More complex transitions can be whole phrases or even sentences that show how the writer is moving from one idea to another.  A transition (underlined) that links this paragraph to the next might be:

Not only do Maude and Mrs. Robinson view and treat sex differently, *they also see the world and their place within it in quite contradictory ways.*

Notice here how the transition and the topic sentence (in italics) have been woven together into a single sentence.

Here's our whole sample paragraph together.  Re-read it now and notice how it incorporates each of the required components of an effective paragraph. Transitions are underlined.

The first and most telling difference between Maude and Mrs. Robinson is in each couples’ view and treatment of sex. Whereas Harold and Maude have sex as an expression of their love for one another, Ben and Mrs. Robinson have sex even though they don’t know or even seem to like one another. For example, when Maude and Harold begin their relationship, sex could not be further from either of their minds. It is only after an extended courtship that involves numerous dates and the sharing of intimate life details that the idea of a physical relationship even begins to creep in. When they do finally have sex, it is only after Harold has confessed his love for Maude with an engraved coin that read, “Harold loves Maude.” To which she responded, “and Maude loves Harold.” This reciprocal love was made physical later that night and it was a beautiful and moving experience for both of them. Even though many in society would judge and condemn their acts, they feel no shame and do not wish to hide their genuine love for one another. It’s just this type of judgement that motivates Ben and Mrs. Robinson to keep their relationship hidden, especially since it does not come from a place of sincere love or even affection. It is simply a physical act between two lonely, depressed and alienated individuals. When Ben tries to make it about more than just sex one night and “have a conversation” with Mrs. Robinson, it ends in a fight with Ben declaring that he is “not proud” of his affair “with a broken-down alcoholic.” Conversely, Mrs. Robinson uses their sexual relationship as a weapon, attempting to blackmail Ben to keep him away from her daughter, Elaine. If either Ben or Mrs. Robinson truly had an affinity for one another, they would not have treated each other with such hostility and disdain. In the end, for this couple, sex was nothing more than a way to pass their days. Whom they were passing their days with, didn’t matter to either of them.