How to Develop Ideas
in Paragraphs

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An important component of a strong essay is the presence of **well-developed ideas** in the essay's body paragraphs. Essays often receive poor grades because the ideas are not developed enough.

So what does it mean to develop an idea?

You develop an idea by supporting it, discussing its significance, and showing how it connects to the rest of your essay and thesis statement. If you can do all three of these things consistently, you will find yourself writing strong, well-developed paragraphs and papers.

Let's look at an example paragraph. For this example, the thesis of the overall paper is "Growing up poor has made me a stronger person."

Poorly developed

Because we didn't have much money, we didn't always have a lot of food. Sometimes all we had were sandwiches. I remember being hungry a lot.

There isn't much to the above paragraph, is there? The author doesn't show the significance of the examples or how they support the thesis of the essay.

Below is a different version of the same paragraph.

Well developed

Because we didn't have much money, we didn't always have a lot of food. Sometimes all we had were sandwiches. I remember being hungry a lot. This made me appreciate the value of money. Today, I always make sure to save and budget enough money for food, because I never want to go hungry again. I have also learned to be smart about how I spend money on food. I'm always looking for good bargains and creative ways to use my leftovers so that I do not waste anything.

This paragraph does a much better job of developing how the examples relate to the main idea and thesis statement. It is longer because the author is making the significance of the ideas in the paragraph clear.

Practice

To write a well-developed paragraph, follow the steps below.

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph? Write it as a complete sentence. This will be your topic sentence.

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2. Support your main idea with at least one example.

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3. Explain how your examples relate to your main idea.

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4. Explain how your main idea supports your thesis.

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