Writing a Strong Academic Paragraph in English:

Overview and Learning Goals

- **Goal:** move from B1 linked sentences to B2 sustained development
- **In university rubrics**, the paragraph—not the sentence—is the core unit of assessment
- **"Strong" means** one clear claim, developed support, analysis, cohesion, unity, academic register
- **Roadmap:** claim, evidence, analysis, cohesion, unity, hedging, revision, rubric self-check
- **Rate your confidence:** state a claim / support it / analyse evidence / link ideas / revise
- **Watch for five weak patterns:** listing, description, opinion-only, vague topic sentence, mechanical transitions



What Makes a Paragraph 'Academic'

- Academic readers expect a claim, reasoning, and evidence — not personal impressions
- Four core features to practise: objectivity, formality, precision, and caution (hedging)
- Replace 'I think', 'a lot of', 'stuff' with hedged, precise phrasing
- Avoid contractions, slang, idioms, rhetorical questions, 'you', and exclamation marks
- Match reporting verbs to evidence strength: 'suggests' vs. 'demonstrates' vs. 'proves'



Informal blog paragraph

I think social media is really important these days. A lot of people use it and it has changed the way we communicate. It can be great because you can keep in touch and find out stuff quickly, but it also has some downsides like making people anxious sometimes.

Exam short answer

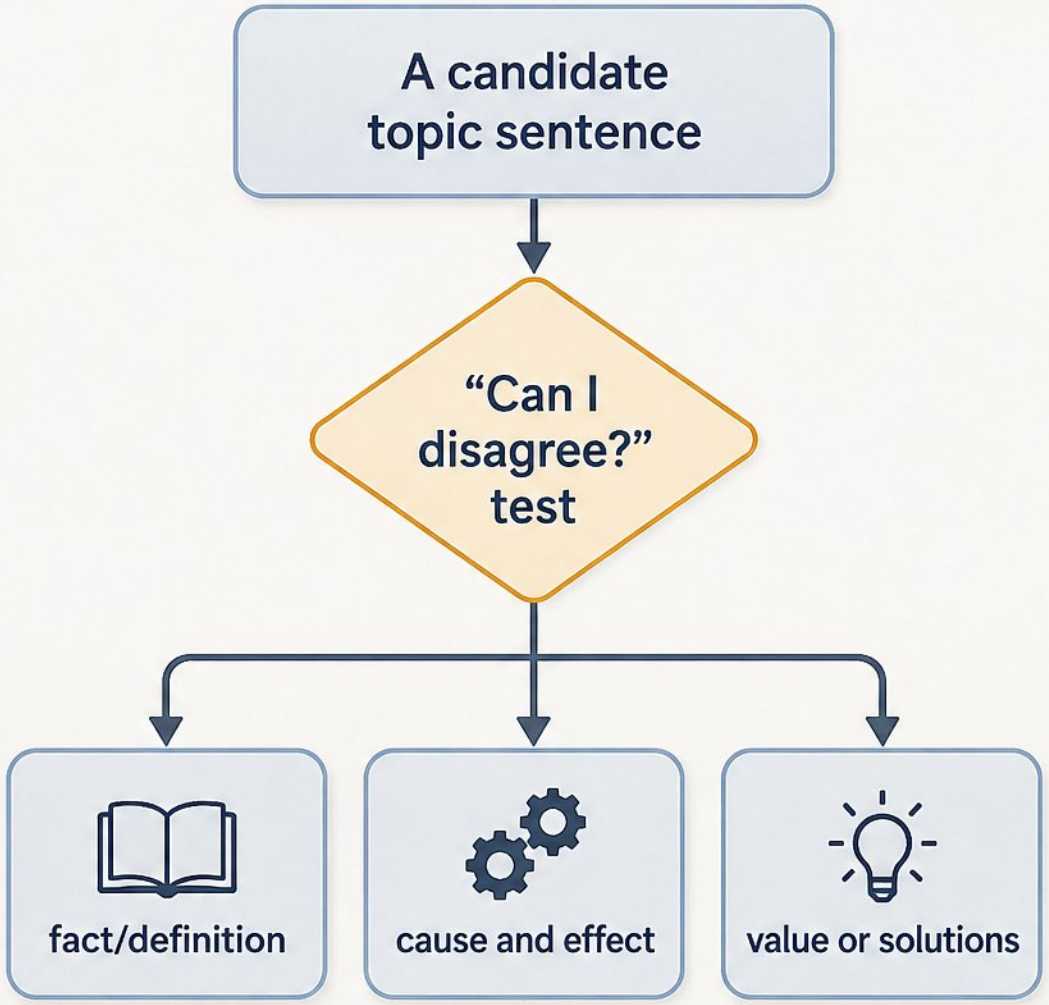
Social media is important because it changes communication. It has benefits, such as keeping in touch, but it also has drawbacks, like increased anxiety.

Academic body paragraph

Recent research suggests that social media has significantly reshaped communication practices (Smith, 2020). This development offers clear benefits, including greater opportunities to maintain social connections. However, it may also contribute to increased anxiety, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of its effects.

The Topic Sentence:
Making a Clear, Arguable Claim

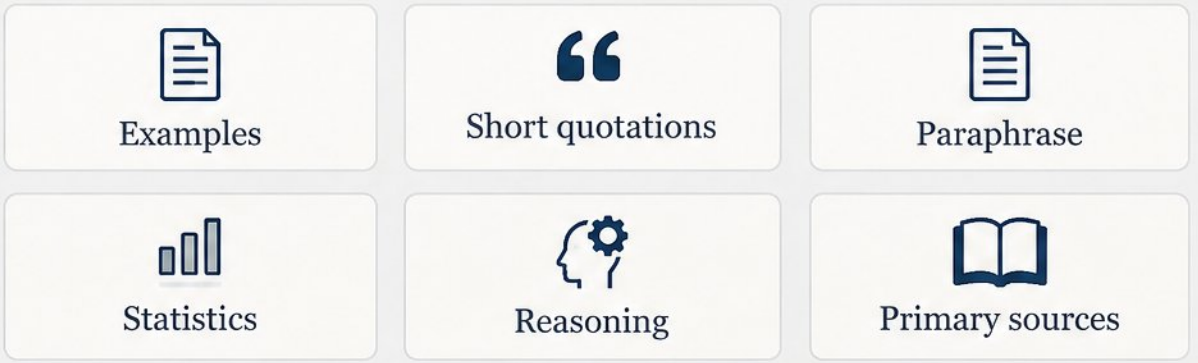
- A topic sentence is a mini-thesis: one main claim for the paragraph
- Two jobs: make a claim, and signal how it advances the essay
- “Can I disagree?” test: if no reader could object, it is a fact
- Usually first; sometimes second after a transition; rarely last
- Avoid: too broad, purely factual, or announcing your plan
- Skip “I think” / “in my opinion” — the claim is already your position
- Try claim types: fact/definition, cause and effect, value or solutions



Supporting the Claim: Evidence

- Choose evidence to fit the claim, not the reverse
- Types: examples, short quotations, paraphrase, statistics, reasoning, primary sources
- Integrate in three moves: signal, situate, synthesise
- Signal = attribution + reporting verb; never drop a quotation alone
- One relevant source used well beats three listed without comment
- Cite as you write — citation belongs inside the paragraph

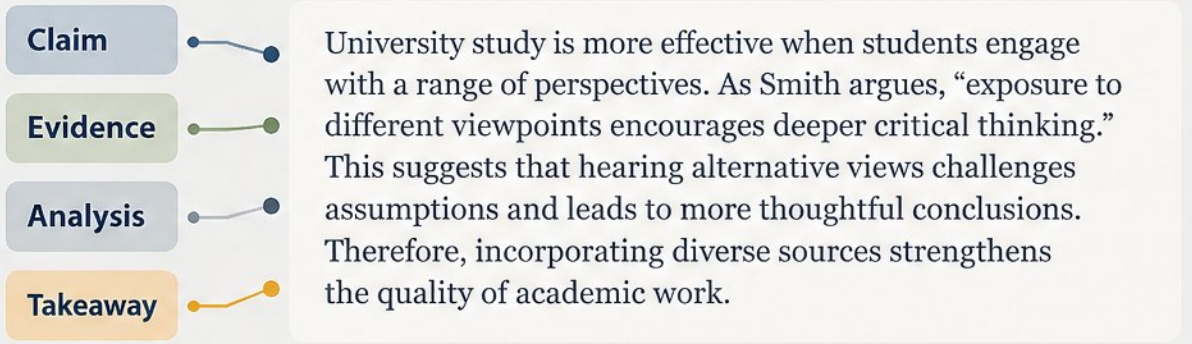
Types of Evidence



Integrating Evidence: Three Moves

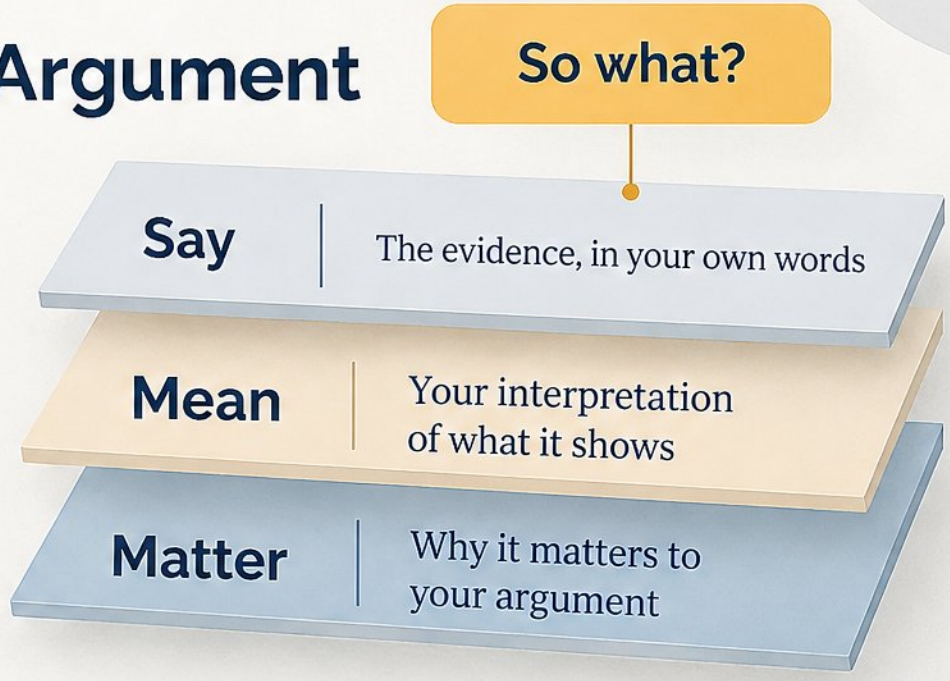


Annotated Paragraph (Example)



Analysis: The 'So What?' That Turns Evidence Into Argument

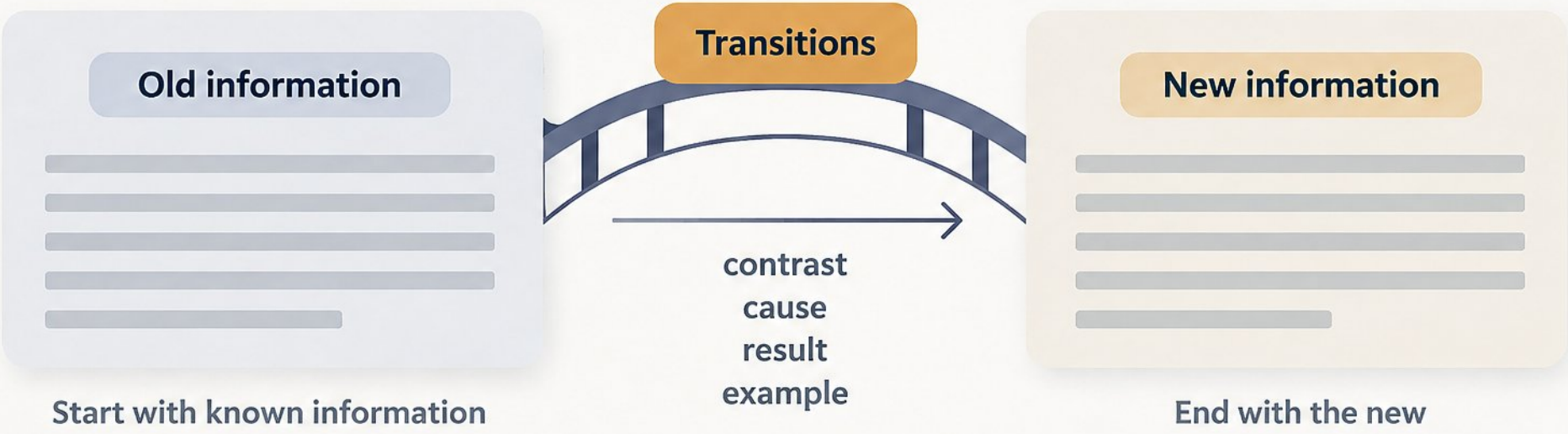
- Evidence alone does not argue; analysis says what it means
- Say–mean–matter: evidence → interpretation → why it matters
- Missing 'mean' loses the evidence–argument link
- Missing 'matter' leaves readers asking why it is here
- If a sentence works without your claim, it is summary
- Aim: one 'mean' + one 'matter' sentence per evidence item
- End with a takeaway sentence, not a new point





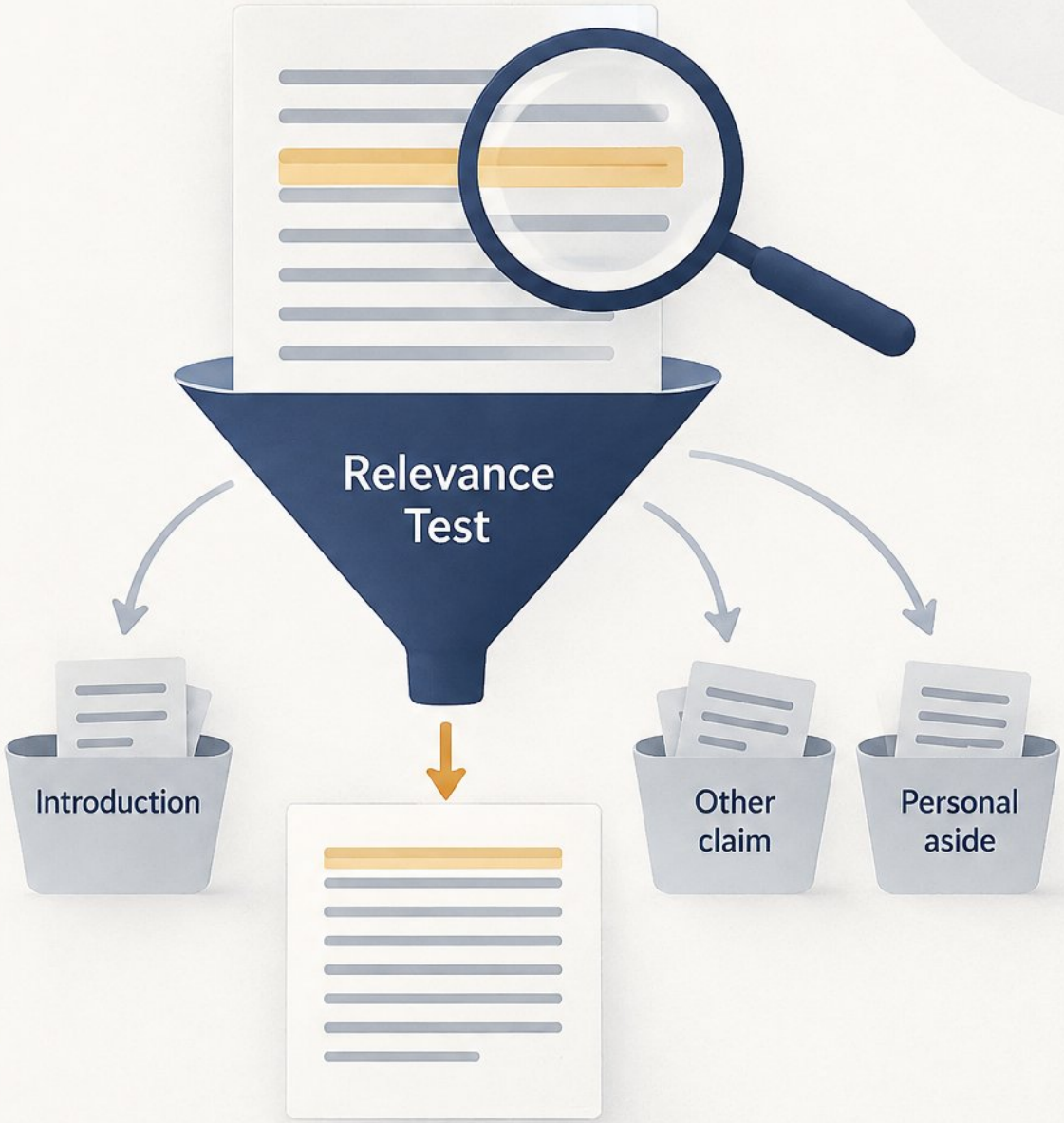
Cohesion: Linking Sentences and Ideas

- Cohesion = surface **links**; **coherence** = the logical flow readers follow
- Transitions work only when they name a real relationship: contrast, cause, result, example
- “Firstly… Secondly… Thirdly…” adds order, not argument — use sparingly
- Three reliable tools: repeated key terms, referencing (*this*, these, such), synonym chains
- Old–new flow: start with known information, end with the new
- Choose an order: general to specific, problem to solution, cause to effect



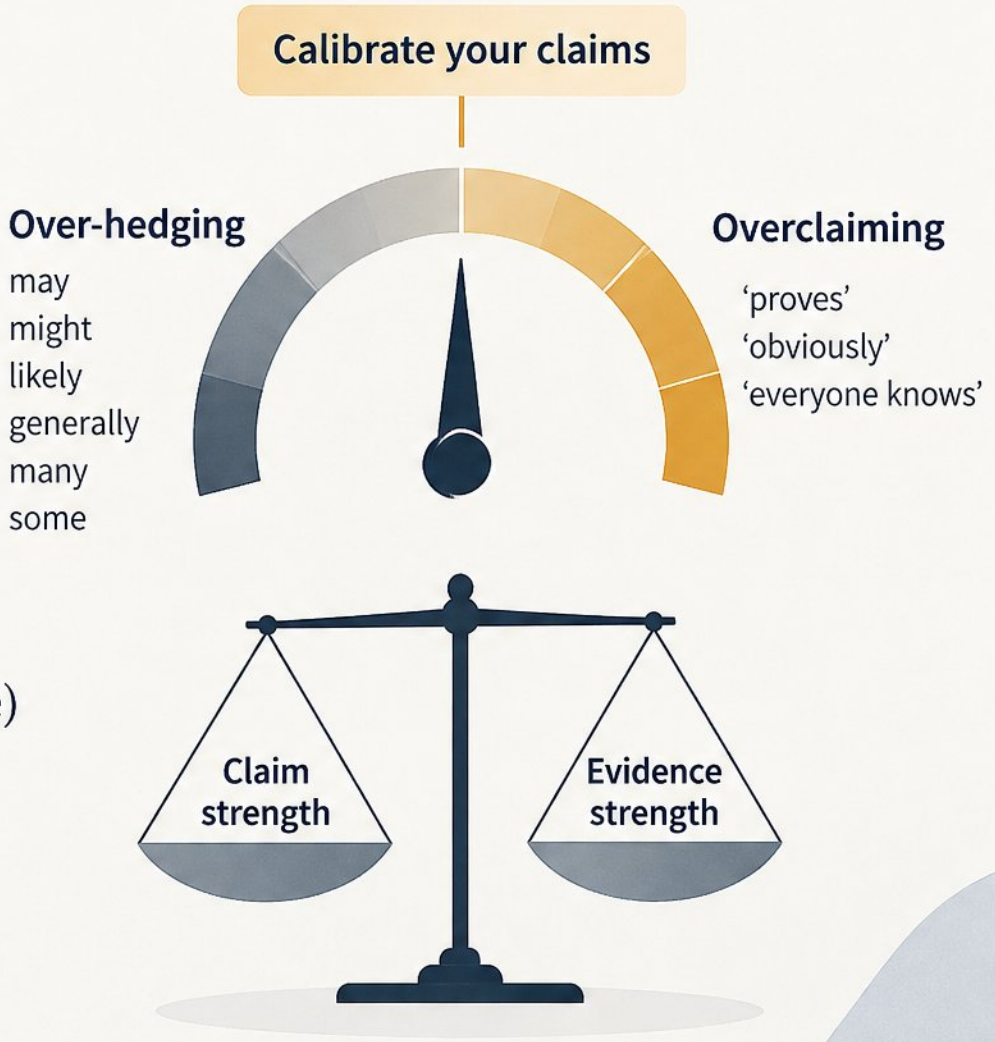
Unity: Keeping One Idea per Paragraph

- Unity rule: every sentence must serve the topic sentence
- Relevance test: How does this sentence develop my claim? If unclear, cut it
- Delete-test: highlight the topic sentence, then remove each other sentence
- If the paragraph still works, that sentence was not needed
- Split when a new claim appears; develop when a claim stays thin
- Manage digressions: background, stray examples, personal asides



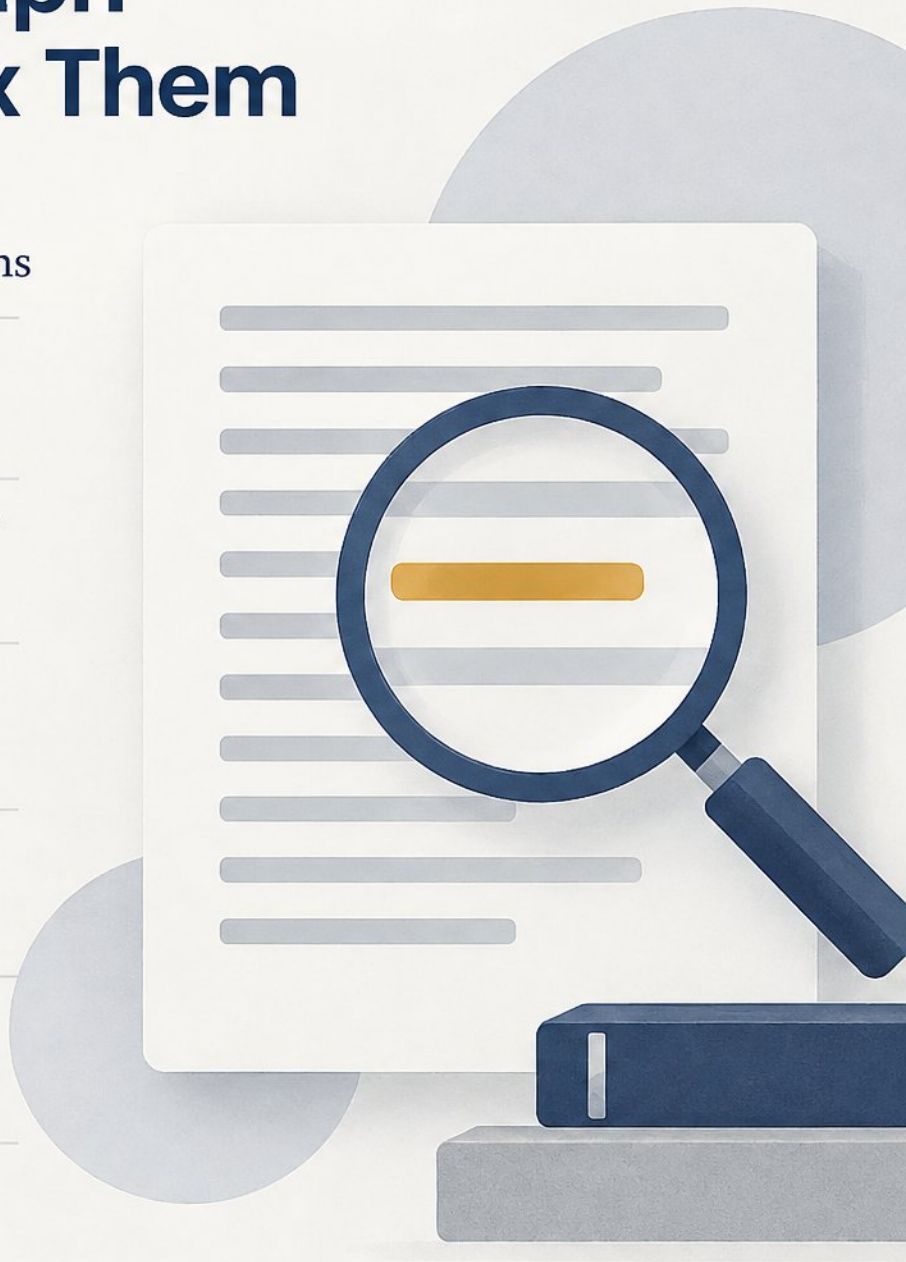
Academic Register: Hedging, Objectivity, and Precision

- Objectivity: focus on research and reasoning, not personal feeling
- Third person is the default for reporting findings; check rules for ‘I’/’we’
- Hedging is not weakness: it calibrates claims to the evidence
- Devices: modals (may, might), adverbs (likely, generally), quantifiers (many, some)
- Cautious reporting verbs: suggests, indicates, is consistent with
- Avoid over-hedging and overclaiming (‘proves’, ‘obviously’, ‘everyone knows’)



Common B1–B2 Paragraph Problems and How to Fix Them

1. Surface errors dominate: commas, tense, agreement, prepositions, word form, collocations
2. Surface errors damage credibility even when ideas are strong
3. Thin support: add one “mean” and one “matter” sentence
4. Fragments, run-ons, comma splices; missing comma after “However”
5. Mixed claims and single-sentence paragraphs: split or develop
6. L1 transfer: word-by-word translation, “although… but”
7. Time pressure and no proofreading: build in checking time



Genre Awareness: Does Your Paragraph Type Change Your Paragraph?

Paragraph Genre	Common Error Pattern	Structure / Focus to Hold
Descriptive	Mechanical errors, list-like detail, weak analysis	
Comparison–contrast	Organisational trouble — hold one structure, organise by criteria	
Cause–effect	Fewer total errors, but tense and connector slips persist	
Argumentative	Claim, evidence, analysis, counter-consideration	

Identify your genre first, then apply the checklist items that fit it.

A Writing Routine: Plan, Draft, Revise

- Plan first: one-sentence claim, evidence list, what each source shows
- Draft the whole paragraph: claim, support, analysis, takeaway
- Revise in five passes: unity, evidence, cohesion, register, accuracy
- Revision is where B1 text becomes B2: paragraphs build towards an argument
- Peer feedback: "I can follow this because..." / "I got lost here because..."
- Timed writing: 2–3 min plan, 15–18 min draft, 4–5 min revise



Guided Practice: Annotating and Strengthening a Draft Paragraph

1. Annotate the sample: topic sentence, evidence, mean, matter, takeaway
2. Diagnose with the checklist: arguable claim? integrated evidence? analysis?
3. Pair task: rewrite the topic sentence so a reader could disagree
4. Pair task: add one "matter" sentence linking evidence to the claim
5. Compare before and after, and name what changed and why
6. Transfer the checklist to your own assignment paragraph

Sample Paragraph (Annotated)

While social media is often criticized, it can also build meaningful community. For example, during natural disasters, people use social media to share real-time information, offer support, and organize volunteer efforts. This shows that social media can connect people in ways that are helpful and humanizing, which matters because stronger community ties can lead to greater resilience in times of crisis. Overall, social media is more than a distraction; it can be a powerful tool for social good.

- While social media is often criticized, it can also build meaningful community. — Claim (topic sentence)
- For example, during natural disasters, people use social media to share real-time information, offer support, and organize volunteer efforts. — Evidence
- This shows that social media can connect people in ways that are helpful and humanizing, — Mean (analysis)
- which matters because stronger community ties can lead to greater resilience in times of crisis. — Matter (analysis)
- Overall, social media is more than a distraction; it can be a powerful tool for social good. — Takeaway

Topic Sentence: Before and After

Before (weaker)

Social media is generally good for society.

→

After (stronger)

While social media is often criticized, it can also build meaningful community.

Checking Your Paragraph Quality: A Compact Rubric

Criterion	Score (1–4)
Claim	○ ○ ○ ○
Evidence	○ ○ ○ ○
Analysis	○ ○ ○ ○
Cohesion	○ ○ ○ ○
Unity	○ ○ ○ ○
Register	○ ○ ○ ○

Find your lowest score first — revision pays off there.

- Six criteria, score 1–4 each: claim, evidence, analysis, cohesion, unity, register
- Aligns with what university markers actually reward
- Find your lowest score first — revision pays off there
- Self-assess: score your paragraph, justify each score in one sentence
- Peer swap: discuss any criterion where scores differ by two or more



Next Steps: From Paragraph to Essay, and Your Two-Week Plan

- Paragraph skills transfer to essays, reports, and exam responses
- Aim for a fast claim–evidence–analysis–takeaway loop in exams
- Choose one goal for two weeks: “Every paragraph has a claim readers could disagree with”
- Daily routine: one paragraph a day — annotate, score, rewrite one sentence
- Build a personal error list and check it before submitting
- Revisit the rubric at the end of two weeks: which criterion is strongest?

BETTER PARAGRAPHS BRIGHTER IDEAS

Your Two-Week Plan

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate
Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence

Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate	Annotate
Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence	Rewrite one sentence

Your Personal Error List

- ○ _____
- ○ _____
- ○ _____
- ○ _____
- ○ _____
- ○ _____
- ○ _____

Check your personal error list before submitting.

PersonWise.

PersonWise • AI digital-human course platform



Scan the code or click anywhere to watch this course live, with voice Q&A

personwise.ai/t/c4dd9273/public