



Palm Beach Atlantic University
Center for Writing Excellence

DEVELOPING A GOOD PARAGRAPH

A good paragraph...

- Has a topic sentence
- Features excellent sentence clarity and structure
- Relates back to the topic sentence and to the thesis
- Does not contain errors like run-on sentences, comma splices, etc.

Bad Paragraph:

In the time it took to find John Wilkes Booth the doctors had failed to revive President Lincoln. Mary was screaming in the parlor and no one spoke. The VP and other guys in the cabinet and other departments had no idea where this Booth character was or if he had maybe died. After they convicted the other guys involved in the plot including a woman Mary her son was involved in the plot and she owned the house where they organized themselves, they were hung and finally the army found Booth and this other guy and an army man shot Booth who was already crippled and he died in a barn. The war was officially over.

Okay Paragraph:

In the time that it took the Union army to find John Wilkes Booth, the doctors had failed to revive Lincoln, who had been shot in the head 9 hours earlier. Mary Lincoln and her son, Robert, waited in the common room, filled with grief as they awaited their loved ones death. Hysterical, Mary was removed from Lincoln's bedside just before he passed. Secretary of War, Stanton was beside himself with grief over losing a friend and confidant. He issued the arrest for John Wilkes Booth. The union army had tracked him to a barn in the far north. After commanding him to surrender, the union army set the barn he was hiding in aflame. Then, when he still didn't come out, they shot him and he later died from his injury. The war was officially over.

Best Paragraph:

In the time that it took the Union Army to find John Wilkes Booth, the doctors who attended to Lincoln's head wound had only succeeded in prolonging the inevitable. Lincoln died in a boarding-house nine hours after he was fatally shot. His wife, Mary, was escorted out of the room just before he passed. The Secretary of War, Stanton, who was fortunate enough to not be attacked by a conspirator, issued the arrest warrant for John Wilkes Booth. The Union Army had tracked Booth to a barn in Port Royal, VA. After commanding that Booth surrender, the army set the barn ablaze; when he failed to surrender, an army man shot and fatally wounded Booth, and he died three hours later. With the death of both men – Lincoln and Booth – the war was officially over.