
STEPS OF A BASIC ESSAY

I. Introduction (*establishes the paper's topic*)

- A. Opening statements (*Sentences containing some general comments about the subject at hand*)
- B. Thesis Statement (*1-2 sentences saying what the paper is about and how it will be broken down. Whatever points are specified here will be reiterated in the Body in the *same order*.*)

EX: Teenage drivers have the highest rate of accidents than any other group of drivers. Due to their lack of judgment, lack of experience, and unwarranted aggression, the high insurance premiums of teenage drivers are more than justified.

II. Body (*describes the paper's main points*)

- A. First Topic (*not the strongest point*)
 - 1. Write one or two paragraphs (dependent on paper length) discussing the first idea in detail. In the same section, back up each paragraph with research, facts, examples, an anecdote (a short personal story), or some type of descriptive justification.
 - 2. The last sentence in this section should be a transitional one. Try to make a statement that sums up the last paragraph, while also introducing the new topic.

EX: Not only do teen drivers' decisions show a marked lack of judgment, but they also show a problematic lack of experience.

- B. Second Topic (*also not the strongest point*)
 - 1. Write one or two paragraphs discussing the 2nd idea in detail.
 - 2. In the same section, back up the ideas with research, facts, examples, an anecdote, or some type of descriptive justification.
 - 3. The last sentence in this section should be a transitional one as well. Try to make a statement that sums up the last paragraph, while also introducing the new topic.

EX: Obviously, since the new driver's lack of experience is such an important factor, high insurance rates are warranted in reflecting that. Similarly, overt aggression is also a contributing point in expensive monthly premiums.

C. Third Topic (*this should be your strongest point or argument*)

1. Write one or two paragraphs discussing the 3rd idea in detail.
2. In the same section, back up the ideas with research, facts, examples, an anecdote, or some type of descriptive justification.
3. The last sentence in this section should be a transitional one as well. Try to make a statement that sums up the last paragraph, while also hinting that the paper is coming to a conclusion or ending.

EX: Clearly, the unwarranted aggression of the new driver is another justifiable reason for the high monthly rates.

III. Conclusion (*wraps up the paper*)

- A. Summarizing Statements (*1-2 sentences rehashing the main points of the paper. Do not ever introduce new thoughts into the concluding paragraph.*)
- B. Reiteration of the Thesis (*1-2 sentences restating the thesis in different words than used in the first paragraph*)
- C. Final Thought (*1 sentence that leaves the reader with your final thought that applies to the topic*)

EX: The new driver should be held accountable for his/her actions. Therefore, high teenage insurance rates are justifiable since experience, judgment, and aggression are common factors found in young drivers. While at first glance insurance rates for new drivers may seem overly exorbitant, these rates merely reflect the serious challenges that come with being a new driver.

The links below offer additional information.

FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/five_par.htm In-depth lesson about developing a five-paragraph essay.

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/intro.html>

Visual lesson about developing an introduction.

THESIS STATEMENTS

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/thesis.htm> In-depth lesson about building a thesis statement.

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/thesistatement.html>

Brief information only.

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_thesis.html Detailed information with links to other research paper information.

http://www.smccd.net/accounts/sevas/esl/classnotes/focus_topic.asp Visual process for developing a thesis statement and how to narrow ideas.

INTRODUCTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

The introduction and conclusion allow a writer to address the overall purpose and significance of an essay. In general terms, the introduction states the intention, while the conclusion defines the achievement of an essay. Together they constitute the frame for your paper, providing the first and last opportunities to convince your reader of its value. Because they occupy such rhetorically important positions in the structure of your paper, the introduction and conclusion should be crafted with care.

There is no single formula for writing introductions and conclusions. The strategy you adopt will depend on the nature of the assignment, the conventions of the academic discipline, and the internal imperatives of your particular argument. But the introduction and conclusion do typically accomplish certain things. They define the scope and focus of an essay. They situate your main point in a larger context. And they help your reader understand the value of your argument.

THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction typically serves several purposes:

- **It sets the tone for your paper.**

Remember that when you write the introduction, you are introducing not only your argument, but also yourself, the author. What kind of persona do you want to project? Presumably, you do not want to come across as dogmatic, impatient, or hostile toward your subject or others who have written about it. This kind of stance will likely alienate a reader, who may choose simply to stop reading. In academic writing, it is much more effective to present yourself as a thoughtful writer who has a good command of the subject, who can acknowledge complexity and nuance, who has made reasonable judgments on the basis of textual or factual evidence, and who is aware of alternative interpretations. In any case, the tone of the introduction is an important part of any strategy of persuasion.

- **It identifies and limits your subject.**

Your introduction tells a reader what you are writing about and defines the scope of your inquiry.

- **It orients your reader by explaining the specific context and rationale for your argument.**

Your reader looks to the introduction not only for the thesis statement or central idea, but also for orientation within the chosen area of inquiry. Take care, therefore, to provide any background or context that will help your reader understand how your work fits into the larger picture, and why it matters. Locate your work on the conceptual map.

- **It presents your thesis or central claim about your subject.**

There is no absolute rule on the length and placement of the thesis statement. But a good rule of thumb for a short (5-page) paper is to state the thesis in one or two sentences at the end of the first paragraph.

- **It engages your reader's attention and persuades her to keep reading.**
Your introduction should present an original thesis on a significant topic within a well-defined subject area. But there are different ways of accomplishing this in an engaging way. For example, you might approach your topic by
 - **moving from the specific to the general:** use an **anecdote, quotation, fact, or textual detail** that illustrates the larger issues
 - **moving from the general to the specific:** first present a somewhat wider view* of the subject, then focus in on the particular area of inquiry.

*Take care, however, that the “wide view” does not become an occasion for windy generality and vague abstraction. The wide view should itself be focused, concrete, and directly relevant to your particular topic. [See below, “Formulaic Introductions”]
 - **posing a significant question or problem** that serves to focus your inquiry
 - **challenging a commonplace interpretation**
- **Sometimes, especially in longer essays, the introduction describes the structure of your essay.**
A brief overview of the organization of your paper can help prepare your reader to follow your argument.

The Challenge of Writing the Introduction

Writing the introduction can be a daunting task, and it is natural to feel anxious about it. After all, you can write a good introduction only if you have a clearly defined thesis statement and a sure command of the relevant evidence. Since these things will emerge only after patient grappling with your texts, it helps if you first *prepare* to write your introduction by studying your materials, taking notes, gathering evidence, organizing ideas, and proposing a possible line of argument. Doing this preparatory work will make the task of writing the introduction much easier. Then you can revisit it as the paper continues to take shape. Some tips:

Be prepared to revise your introduction at any point during the writing process.

In the course of drafting the essay you may discover a *more* compelling argument than the one with which you began. If this happens, you will want to sharpen, adjust, or change your thesis statement and introduction so that they reflect your new focus. Again, this is a natural, perhaps even necessary, part of the writing experience. For while academic prose takes a linear form, the process that produces the best such writing is constantly recursive and dialectical. *The good introduction is the result of a process that includes preparatory thinking, provisional drafting, and ongoing revision.*

State your purpose early.

Many students worry that if they present their central ideas in the introduction, they will have nothing left to say in the body of the paper. But your reader is looking to the introduction for a clear

statement of purpose; if it's not there, you may lose more in confusion than you gain in suspense. And remember that the strength of your paper lies not *only* in the introductory presentation of your

main idea, but also in the careful execution of a well-developed argument. Your reader will remain engaged both because you have a clear and interesting claim, *and* because you go on to justify that claim with compelling evidence and a detailed, disciplined argument. The point here is that you can present your central claim in the introduction without depriving your reader of the sense of ongoing discovery that arises from well-chosen evidence and cogent analysis.

Avoid formulaic introductions.

The formulaic introduction is usually a sign of poor preparation. If you haven't thought deeply and carefully enough about your subject, it will not be possible to generate an original thesis and a focused argument about it. The result will be a paper that relies on little more than vague generality and empty formula. Among the formulaic approaches you should avoid are introductions that present:

The history-of-the-world: "From the dawn of time...." This kind of opening gives readers the impression that you have not mastered your material sufficiently to say something substantive and specific about it.

The dictionary definition: "According to Webster's...." Like any general formula, this one evades the specific demands of your subject. If the definition of terms is important to your argument – and it usually is – take care to make distinctions and present definitions that are *specific* to your materials. This is especially important if there is disagreement about the meaning of key terms among those who have written about a given subject. It may be useful to consult dictionaries, but be sure that you remain sensitive to the specific meaning(s) of a term as it appears in your particular materials.

THE CONCLUSION

Like the introduction, the conclusion brings your central ideas into focus – but now, at the end of your paper, they appear in light of the foregoing argument. Obviously, then, the goal is to make your reader feel that the argument has fully achieved the goals you have set in the introduction. Your reader should feel convinced by your argument and satisfied that all has come full circle. It is a good idea, therefore, to write the final versions of the introduction and conclusion each with the other in mind – and to make any adjustments to them (or to the intervening argument) that are needed to make the declared goals match the actual accomplishment.

Writing the conclusion can be challenging, because now that you have completed the main argument, it may seem as if the only thing left to do is to summarize it. Certainly, the conclusion typically includes an element of summary, but an effective conclusion does not feel like *mere* summary. For even as you move to recapitulate and close your argument, it is important to sustain your reader's interest by using your conclusion to extend, and not just repeat that argument. Even in the conclusion you should strive to produce in your reader a sense of discovery and prospect.

There are different ways of doing this. For example:

- Indicate how your main point fits into a larger context. Show how your discoveries resonate within the larger subject area.

- Explain the implications of your research and interpretation. What difference might it make to the way we think about the relevant issues? Do your conclusions challenge common assumptions about your topic? How might your methods or findings apply to other problems?

- Consider making recommendations for future research on matters related to, but beyond the scope of this particular paper.
- You might incorporate key words and phrases from your introduction, presenting them now in a way to reveal their greater depth, nuance, or implication.

The length of both the introduction and conclusion should be appropriate to the length of the entire paper. Once again, there is no fixed rule, but as a general rule of thumb, one might devote one paragraph to each in a short essay, and up to several pages in longer papers like JPs. The introduction and conclusion in a Senior Thesis might each deserve a chapter.

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Five Steps to Writing an Essay

1. **Brainstorm**
 - a. List all thoughts that enter your head about the essay topic.
 - b. Clearly, some of these thoughts will be random and worthless. Many of your thoughts, however will be inspired and critical for your essay. Do not waste time and energy determining just which thoughts are valuable, potentially valuable, or clearly worthless. List them all.
 - c. Do not worry about complete sentences, spelling, grammar, or other such stylistic issues. The goal here is to generate ideas quickly.
 - d. You know that you are close to done when you have at least two pages of binder paper filled with ideas.

2. **Organize List**
 - a. Take the ideas on your binder paper and organize them into categories. Categories include “ridiculous ideas that will clearly not work in an essay”, controversial ideas (i.e. ideas that contradict points raised in lecture or in the readings”, “non-controversial ideas”, etc.
 - b. This step is tedious, but it will make writing the essay much easier as it will clarify your thinking: rewrite the organized groupings on a clean sheet of paper.
 - c. Start looking for patterns and for a point of view that best reflects your take on the topic
 - d. Scribble a rough thesis somewhere on this tidy version.
 - e. Write down the kind of evidence you would need to find in the library and/or on the Internet that would support and undermine your thesis.

3. **Outline**
 - a. This is clearly the TOUGHEST part of the writing process. If you have written a good outline, then you will find that essay almost “writes itself”. Give yourself enough time to do a first rate job.
 - b. Look at the groupings n your organized list. Look at your rough thesis statement. Find connections; find support for your thesis; develop an argument that refutes your thesis; finally, develop an argument that over-rides this devastating argument and rescues your rough thesis statement.
 - c. The outline will contain six parts: I. Introduction; II Supporting Argument; III Potentially Devastating Counter-argument; IV. Counter to the Counter-argument; V. Conclusion; VI. Bibliography. It must be double-spaced and typed with 12-point font.

- d. Introduction – This is the “stage-set”. Set up your reader so that he cares about your thesis statement. There are several ways to do this. Introduce the reader to the importance of your topic. For example: small privatization is important because it has been used in many post-socialist countries to encourage small-scale entrepreneurship. Introduce the particular situation or policy under discussion. More hints on just how to do this are available in the writing resources listed in the syllabus. Next comes your thesis statement. Make it strong. Do not equivocate and do not show the reader both sides of the argument. Next comes your road map where you tell your reader in two or three points what to expect. Do not write a sentence about each body paragraph, because this is lethally boring for your reader.
- e. Supporting Argument – Here you need to provide a logical argument and evidence that supports your thesis statement. For example: if your thesis statement is that small-scale privatization effectively provided the correct incentives for efficient entrepreneurs to contribute to economic growth, you will need to find evidence for a particular region and/or country in which that was in fact the case. You must collect source materials, cite this material, and then place these sources in a bibliography using the MLA format.
- f. Potentially Devastating Counter-Argument – Here you will provide a logical argument and evidence that potentially undermines the logic and argument in the previous section. For example: you may find evidence that in your particular region, an important reason that small-scale entrepreneurs operated effectively is that there was substantial foreign investment and that small-scale privatization was not critical. Again, cite source material and place these sources in a bibliography using the MLA format. You should cite at least five different sources in the supporting argument and potential devastating counter-argument sections. Sources taken from the Economics 1670 syllabus should be cited but DO NOT count as one of these five sources.
- g. Counter to the Counter-Argument – Make a logical argument backed with evidence that your original argument is more convincing than your potentially devastating counter-argument. For example: you might argue that the small-scale privatization not only encouraged entrepreneurs to buy up small shops that they effectively restructured, but it also attracted foreign investment that financed infrastructure such as telecommunications that enabled these domestic entrepreneurs to operate efficiently. Show some respect for the counter-argument. For example: if you are looking at a particular region in Russia such as Samara, you should note that while the counter-argument fails and your initial argument works in Samara, the counter-argument might have more explanatory power in other regions.
- h. Conclusion – This is hard, although not as difficult as the introduction. First, summarize your argument. Then, argue why your point is the only reasonable one to make for the topic under discussion.
- i. Hand in this five-point outline and bibliography in-class on the due date. Come to class prepared to discuss your outline on the scheduled tutorial day.

- j. After the tutorial discussion and after receiving written comments on your outline, be prepared to sharpen your thesis statement and find more evidence. Be prepared, if necessary, to re-organize the outline if the counter-argument is more convincing than the supporting argument.
4. Write the First Draft
 - a. Using your revised outline as a guide, start writing. Be sure not to stray from your revised outline.
 - b. The best evidence that you can use is based on reliable statistical evidence or a careful description of the operation of actual institutions. Such evidence is most reliable at a regional, household or firm level.
 - c. If you are using regional, household, or firm level statistical or institutional data, you need to comment on just how representative this is for an entire country. If the data is not highly representative this is fine as long as you persuade your reader that it is still important to consider this region or this set of households or this sample of firms.
 - d. Do an initial proofreading and editing job on your first draft.
 - e. Put away your first draft, preferably overnight.
 - f. Hand in this first draft and revised bibliography on the due-date. Come to class prepared to discuss your first draft on the scheduled tutorial day.
 5. Final Draft
 - a. After receiving written and oral comments on your first draft, you will start to write the final draft.
 - b. This step is mainly a marketing and packaging job. The thinking has been done, so make sure that your idea gets the shot it deserves.
 - c. Run a spell check program on your draft.
 - d. DO NOT use a grammar check program. These programs do not always promote clear and concise writing. For help, consult the writing sources on the syllabus or make an appointment with a writing consultant in the Pitt writing lab.
 - e. Make sure that your bibliography and citations conform to the MLA style. Make sure that your thesis statement, supporting argument, potentially devastating counter-argument, counter to the counter-argument and conclusion are all clearly and elegantly stated.
 - f. Hand in your final paper on time!

Types of Essays

(Information obtained from *Successful College Writing* 2nd ed. by Kathleen T. McWhorter)

Narrative Essay

What is it?

A narrative essay achieves a certain purpose through telling a story, which makes it interesting to the reader and also results in getting some point across. For example, you might write a story about meeting someone special to you. The purpose may be to tell how meeting this person affected your decision to attend college or to entertain the reader with a funny story about that person. The purposes of writing narratives include the following: to create a sense of shared history, to provide entertainment, to offer instruction, and to provide insight. Some examples of narrative essay topics include a special person, event, or place. After choosing a topic, you should determine the main point you want to make about that topic and then concentrate on that throughout the rest of the paper.

Guidelines for writing a narrative essay:

Make a specific point. Determine what the purpose of your essay is. State that point in your thesis statement, or controlling idea, and build upon it throughout the essay by using examples, stories, and other details that all relate back to the main idea.

Involve readers in the story and create a visual picture by using dialogue and physical description, which is achieved through telling events that happened and presenting problems that arose. Also include specific descriptive details so that the reader can easily picture the scene in each of the events.

Sequence events. Often this is done chronologically (the order in which events happened), but using flashbacks (writing the story from one point in time but then talking briefly about something that happened in the past) and foreshadowing (briefly talking about something that will happen in the future) can make the story more interesting.

Decide which point of view, first-person (from the author's point of view, using "I") or third-person (using "he," "she," "them," etc. instead of "I"), works best for your essay, and tell the story from that viewpoint.

Descriptive Essay

What is it?

A descriptive essay tells about a certain topic or story, using details to appeal to the five senses. It gives readers the ability to vividly imagine the situation or scene and feel as if they are experiencing it firsthand. To write a descriptive essay, you could choose a person, place, event, object, or experience and describe it thoroughly using many sensory details.

Guidelines for writing a descriptive essay:

Use sensory details. Appeal to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Use active verbs (in which the subject is doing the acting instead of being acted upon by something or someone else, such as “Cindy hit the ball.” instead of “The ball was hit by Cindy.”). Also, use a variety of sentence types, such as a simple sentence (“Tom went to the store.”), compound sentence (“Tom went to the store, and he bought a loaf of bread.”), complex sentence (“While Tom was at the store, he bought a loaf of bread.”), or compound-complex sentence (“While Tom was at the store, he bought a loaf of bread, but he forgot to buy a gallon of milk.”).

Avoid vague language, such as “pretty,” “really,” “a lot,” and “very.”

Create a dominant impression (overall attitude, mood, or feeling about the subject), such as causing the readers to sympathize with you about a sad event that happened or to agree with you strongly on a certain controversial topic. Choose the details and descriptions that will help accomplish this impression.

Use comparisons. In order to help make the descriptions even more vivid to the reader, use similes (such as “His emotional state was like a roller coaster.”), metaphors (such as “Her smile was a ray of sunlight in the dark sea of unfamiliar faces.”), personification (giving human characteristics to an object, such as “The wind howled in my ears and beckoned me to walk further into the forest.”), and analogies (brief stories that relate to the topic). Determine the method of organization that works best for your essay: spatial (top to bottom, inside to outside, near to far), chronological (the order in which events happened), least-to-most, or most-to-least.

Comparison and/or Contrast Essay

What is it?

A comparison and/or contrast essay tells about two or more main subjects by pointing out similarities and/or differences. One way to write this type of essay would be to choose two or more objects, people, places, events, experiences, or ideas and compare and/or contrast them according to a few specific points.

Guidelines for writing a comparison and/or contrast essay:

Have a clear purpose and a main point (to express ideas, to inform, to persuade, etc.).

Make sure your subjects have something specific on which you can base your comparison and/or contrast.

Decide the order that best suits your essay. The two main ways you can choose to organize a comparison and/or contrast essay are point-by-point organization and subject-by-subject organization.

point-by-point: switching back and forth between the subjects, comparing/contrasting them according to several main points

subject-by-subject: writing about all the main points of one subject and then writing about all the main points of another subject, and so on, referring back to the other subject(s) in a comparing/contrasting way

In your thesis statement, or controlling idea, include the subjects; identify whether you will be talking about similarities, differences, or both; and state your main point.

Have a sufficient number of significant characteristics and details (which are the various points you use to compare and/or contrast the subjects), and give an equal amount to all

sides.

Cause and Effect Essay (also called causal analysis)

What is it?

A cause and effect essay analyzes what causes certain things to happen or why things are a certain way, the results brought about by certain events, or both. For example, you may want to write an essay about an event that happened and then tell how it affected your life. This would tell the cause (the event) and the effect (how it affected your life). To begin writing a cause and effect essay, you may want to first decide on a topic, such as an event or a person, and then decide what you will tell about that topic, such as what happened to make that specific event take place or what made the person have a certain attitude or personality. You could also tell about a specific topic and what effects it had on future events.

Guidelines for writing a cause and effect essay:

Decide whether you will focus on causes, effects, or both.

There can be multiple causes of one effect. (For example, because you saved your money, shopped around for the best deal, and saw an ad in a newspaper, you were able to buy the car of your dreams.) There can also be one cause of multiple effects. (For example, your decision to stay out late one night may have caused you to miss an important phone call, forget to study for a test, and made you tired the next day.) There can also be a chain of events in which each effect turns out to be the cause of another effect. (For example, one event may have affected your decision to travel to Europe, which affected your decision to study a foreign language, which helped you get a job as a travel agent.)

Have a clear purpose (to tell information, to persuade readers, or both). This purpose is achieved through a main idea, which should be included in the thesis statement, or controlling idea.

Choose a logical organization. For example, you may want to use chronological (the order in which events happened), most-to-least (such as most effective to least effective or most difficult to least difficult), least-to-most (such as least costly to most costly or least obvious to most obvious), or order of importance (such as a belief that is most important to you, then a belief that is a little less important, and so on).

Explain cause and/or effect fully, using details to support your explanations.

Argumentative Essay

What is it?

An argumentative essay makes a claim and then gives examples and evidence to prove that point. You can begin writing an argumentative essay by deciding on a certain topic, such as something about a belief, idea, or controversial issue. Then, do research to obtain detailed information. The information can be statistics, stories, examples, observances, and other facts. Use the information throughout the essay to argue your point and convince the reader.

Guidelines for writing an argumentative essay:

Choose a narrow issue.

Tell your reader what you believe about the issue very clearly and specifically in your thesis statement, or controlling idea.

Be aware of your audience and anticipate the reader's views. This means that if you know your readers will most likely not believe a certain statement because it goes against traditional beliefs or their personal viewpoints, make sure you give solid evidence to back it up.

Use convincing details as evidence to support your claim. These should be from believable and reliable sources. For example, if you're stating something that has to do with human health, quote a doctor who knows about that topic, or if you are talking about a trend in society, include statistics from a well-known organization.

Choose the most appropriate way of arguing your point (inductive or deductive).

inductive=start with stating all the evidence and then move on to one conclusion

deductive=start with one basic statement of belief and move on to the supporting points of evidence

Acknowledge opposing viewpoints to prove you have thought about the topic thoroughly yet still find that your point is correct.