

Outline for a Five-Paragraph Essay

Paragraph 1: Introduction

The introductory paragraph should include the following elements:

- ◆ **Background information:** Enough information necessary for your reader to understand your topic
- ◆ **Thesis statement:** Indicates your paper's topic, makes your paper's purpose clear, and provides an overview of the **three main supporting points** that will unify the essay. The thesis statement is typically the last sentence.
- ◆ If you are writing in response to a text, the introduction should include the title, author, and genre of that piece.

Paragraph 2: Body Paragraph

- ◆ Begins with a **topic sentence** that identifies **one main idea** that will be discussed as support or proof for the thesis statement
- ◆ **Supporting sentences** use specific details, demonstrated through closely related examples or evidence, to expand and explain the main idea. Generally, a well-developed paragraph has at least five to eight sentences.
- ◆ **Paragraph unity** means that all ideas in a paragraph are closely related to its topic sentence and further develop that topic sentence. That is, all sentences in a single paragraph must be unified around a central point or idea.

Paragraph 3: Body Paragraph

- ◆ This paragraph, and any subsequent body paragraph, should begin with a **topic sentence** that signals the reader that a **new idea** or point is being introduced.
- ◆ As you organize your essay, keep in mind its coherence. **Coherence** refers to connections among paragraphs and ideas—the logical sequence of your thoughts.
 - Use **transition words or phrases** at the *outset* of your body paragraphs and to move from one idea to another *within* your paragraphs.
 - Have you transitioned logically from the main idea in the previous paragraph to this one? Are you making clear connections among the paragraphs and ideas? Be sure to think about coherence during the revision stage of the writing process.

Paragraph 4: Body Paragraph

- ◆ This paragraph begins with the final **topic sentence** that relates back to the remaining point mentioned in the thesis statement. Each paragraph should contain a new main idea.
- ◆ Again, flesh out this main idea with specific examples, details, and relevant support.
- ◆ Be sure to maintain paragraph unity. That is, each sentence must relate to your topic sentence.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- ◆ The conclusion revisits your overall purpose for writing and often invites your reader to consider the implications of why your ideas are significant.
- ◆ The conclusion may restate the thesis, summarize the paper's major points, or leave the reader with a final thought to ponder. Several other methods for writing conclusions are included on a separate Tutoring Center handout. If you choose to restate the thesis or summarize the essay's main ideas, do not repeat the same wording from the introduction or body paragraphs. Remember not to introduce new, unrelated ideas in the conclusion.

Think of the introduction and conclusion as “bookends” that serve to hold the essay tightly together. The introduction will “push” into or initiate the examination of your topic and the angle you decide to focus on, while the conclusion will “pull” tight all the ideas that you have gathered together for a unified essay.

Remember, while the five paragraph essay is a common assignment, other writing may require a more in-depth thesis, often leading to a paper with more than three supporting points in need of their own body paragraphs. Follow the plan for Paragraph 3 if you need to expand beyond three main points. Check with your instructor to ensure whether or not you can exceed this length for an assignment.

Graphic Organizer for a Five-Paragraph Essay

Paragraph 1: Introduction

Background Information:

Thesis Statement:

Paragraph 2: First Body Paragraph (Point 1)

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 3: Second Body Paragraph (Point 2)

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 4: Third Body Paragraph (Point 3)

Topic Sentence:

Supporting Details:

Paragraph 5: Conclusion