

The Essay

An essay consists of several paragraphs that develop one topic. An essay has three parts:

1. **The Introduction**

This is generally one paragraph that introduces the topic and tells the reader what will follow in the subsequent body paragraphs. The introduction contains the thesis statement, which is the central idea of the essay. The thesis statement usually comes at the end of the introduction.

2. **The Body Paragraphs**

The number of body paragraphs depends on the number of main points you want to discuss. The body paragraphs support the thesis statement in the introduction.

3. **The Conclusion**

This paragraph ends the essay. It sums up the main points or restates the thesis statement. It also leaves the reader with a final thought or comment on the topic.

The number of paragraphs that an essay should have depends on the depth of the writer's examination of the topic. For this level, essays written in class contain from two to four paragraphs, as well as an introduction and a conclusion.

The Introduction

The function of an introduction in an essay is to introduce the topic and present the thesis. An introduction should also be interesting enough to make the reader want to continue on to find out what you have to say.

There are several strategies that can help make your introduction more interesting to the reader. Here are some suggestions:

Start with a strong opinion. Starting with a strong opinion can catch the reader's attention because the reader may not have thought of this point of view before.

There are no creatures on earth less practical than humans. And nothing shows our frivolity better than fashion. From women's hoop skirts to men's high hats, fashion victims through the ages have endured the ridiculous, the uncomfortable, and the absolutely dangerous in their desire to be fashionable. Even our feet, which are normally planted firmly on the ground, have suffered the pains of keeping up with the latest craze.

Start with a question. Starting with a question is a way of breaking into a subject, using the rest of the essay, including the thesis statement, to answer the question.

Cleanliness is considered a virtue, but just what does it mean to be clean? As most of us have had the unpleasant occasion to discover, one person's definition can be quite different from another's. From Istanbul to Indianapolis, people have their own ways of keeping clean and their own reasons for doing so.

Start with a quotation. Starting with a quotation can make your introduction lively. The quotation should be directly linked to the main idea of the essay. It can be a well-known saying, a remark from a well-known person, or a line from a song or poem.

"Let me have men about me that are fat," says Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to Marcus Antonius. In his opinion, fat people are more trustworthy than thin ones, that is, those with a "lean and hungry look," who "are dangerous."

Start with an anecdote. Starting with an anecdote or story makes an abstract idea more real to the reader. The anecdote should be related to the thesis.

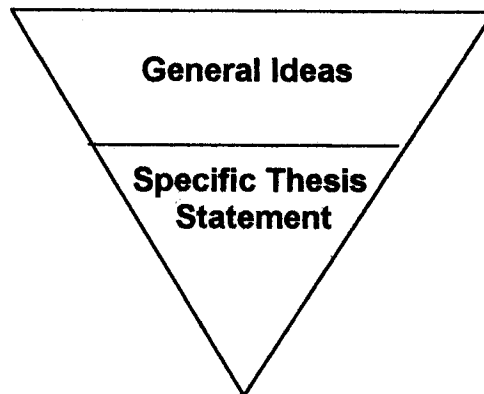
Imagine walking on the surface of Mars. You follow the channels where water is believed to have once flowed, hike across the flat plains covered with rocks of all sizes, and jump the basin called Hellas, measuring more than 930 miles across. After you explore the polar caps, you climb the huge volcano Olympus Mons, which is twice as high as Earth's highest peak. Seem impossible? It may be in the real world, but not in virtual reality.

An introduction has two parts:

1. General statements
2. Thesis statements

1. General Statements

The first sentence in an introductory paragraph should be a general statement about the topic. Its purpose is to get the reader's attention (see the above introductions) and to give background information on the topic. Each statement that follows the general statement should be more specific than the one before it, usually ending with the thesis statement. Your introduction, therefore, will have funnel shape as seen in the diagram below.



2. Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is usually the last sentence in the introduction. It is also the most important sentence in the introduction. A thesis statement gives the specific topic and central idea of the whole essay. It states the writer's approach to (method of organization) or attitude to the central idea, and may list the subtopics that will be discussed in the body paragraphs. Each of the topic sentences in the body paragraphs should relate to the thesis statement.

Remember these points about a thesis statement:

1. It states the main topic.
2. It may list subdivisions of the topic.
3. It may indicate the method of organization.

The thesis statement should also:

- be expressed in a complete sentence.
- express an opinion, an idea, or a belief. It should not be a plain fact.

Example:

Not a thesis statement:

Diet colas contain artificial sweeteners.

Thesis Statement:

Artificial sweeteners in diet colas may be dangerous to one's health.

- express only one idea about a topic. If it expresses more than one, the essay will lack unity.

Example:

Not a thesis statement:

Advertising on American television is becoming more sophisticated and there are some interesting movies.

Thesis statement:

Advertising on American television is becoming more sophisticated.

- not just announce a topic.

Example:

Not a thesis statement:

I am going to write about traffic problems in Thailand.

Thesis statement:

Traffic problems in Thailand disrupt people's lives.

EXERCISE 1

Read the following sentences. Some are thesis statements and some are not. Put a check mark next to each thesis statement.

1. Art has played a vital role in society since the earliest cave dwellers painted scenes on cave walls.
2. Art today is more varied than at any other time in history, and art is one way to help people with emotional problems.
3. Art is a form of human expression, and thus a means of fulfilling an important human need.
4. I am going to write about the function of art during the Renaissance.
5. We can enrich our lives by developing a more active appreciation of the art we live with.
6. For children, painting and drawing are play activities.
7. Folk art is a term applied to works made by individuals with no academic training in art.
8. Folk art is spontaneous, personal, and appealing form of art.

- ___ 9. Modern artists enjoy much greater freedom than artists of even a few generations ago, and photography is now considered an art form of its own.
- ___ 10. The social role of artists has changed over time.
- ___ 11. A patron is a person who buys or orders works of art.
- ___ 12. Without patrons, artists could not prosper.

Exercise 2

Read the following introductory paragraphs and answer the questions that follow.

There is a difference between being an onlooker and being a true observer of art. Onlookers just walk by a work of art, letting their eyes record it while their minds are elsewhere. They have no true appreciation of art. Observers, on the other hand, are informed and appreciative. They have spent the time and energy to educate themselves so that art will be meaningful. They don't just exist side by side with art, they live with it and are aware of its existence in even the smallest part of their daily lives.

1. What is the topic?
2. What is the thesis statement?
3. What device is used to catch the reader's interest?

What is art? People in the past always thought they knew what art was. Today, however, art is harder to define. Art in this century is far more complex, for several different reasons. People are exposed to the art of many times and cultures. Much of modern art is difficult to classify. And to further complicate things, we now have works of art created in media undreamed of a few decades ago, including electronic images that may disappear within moments of their creation. It's no wonder that people are asking what exactly art is and isn't, and how we can tell the difference.

4. What is the topic?
5. What is the thesis statement?
6. What device is used to catch the reader's interest?

“ The only difference between me and a madman is that I am not mad,” said Salvador Dali, probably the most famous Surrealist artist. Like many other modern artists, such as Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Much, and Jean Dubuffet, Dali was interested in the relationship between madness and creativity. Certainly the works of these artists, with their swirling lines, strange scenes and fantastic dreamlike quality, appear to be the products of unstable minds. Van Gogh produced a whole body of work while in an asylum, so the question of whether madness contributed to his work, and might even have been the force behind it, is a valid one. Where does creativity end and madness begin? Is the line that separates them so thin as to be unrecognizable? These are questions that must be explored in any study of the relationship between madness and creativity in the world of art.

7. What is the topic?
8. What is the thesis statement?
9. What device is used to catch the reader’s interest?

The Body Paragraphs

The number of paragraphs in the body of an essay written for this class may range from two to four. Their function is to explain or prove the thesis statement.

Remember the following points about body paragraphs:

1. *The main idea of the body paragraph should support the thesis statement.* If the thesis statement is about the advantages of exercise—“Regular exercise is beneficial to health.”—then the topic sentence of each body paragraph should be about *how* regular exercise is beneficial for health.
2. *Each body paragraph should discuss one aspect of the thesis.* If you are writing about the benefits of exercise, then each body paragraph would discuss one benefit of exercise for health.
3. *The body paragraphs should follow an order:* The order of the paragraphs is determined by the type of organization you are using. Each body paragraph should follow the other smoothly through the use of transitions.

Developing Body Paragraphs

Once you have written a thesis statement, you can develop the topics for the body paragraphs in several ways, depending on your thesis statement. You can break it into reasons, steps in a process, advantages and disadvantages, causes, effects, examples, points of comparison and contrast.

A sample way of developing body paragraphs is to look at the central idea of the thesis statement and turn it into a question. The answers to the question will help you decide on the body paragraphs.

Example:

Thesis statement:

Regular exercise is beneficial to health.

Question:

In what way is regular exercise beneficial to health?

Answers:

Exercise is good for blood circulation.

It burns up extra calories.

It keeps the body and muscles flexible.

The central idea of the thesis statement is *beneficial to health*. Asking the question "in what way?" provides the answers above. Each body paragraph would focus on a different benefit of exercise.

Example:

Thesis statement:

Hawaii and Alaska have some similarities.

Question:

What similarities?

Answers:

Both are not connected to the forty-eight contiguous states.

Both have a large population of native peoples.

Both are expensive states in which to live.

Here the body paragraphs break down by looking at the points of similarity.

Exercise 3

Look at the following thesis statement and the two supporting topic sentences that follow the question that is being asked and write the last topic sentence.

1. Thesis: *There are advantages to having a small family.*

Topic sentences:

- I. *Parents can afford more things.*
- II. *Family decisions are easier.*
- III. _____

2. Thesis: *Watching television has harmful effects on society.*

Topic sentences:

- I. *Families no longer talk to each other.*
- II. *People lose interest in their community.*
- III. _____

3. Thesis: *New York and Los Angeles have many contrasts.*

Topic sentence:

- I. *There are climatic differences.*
- II. *There are differences in cultural life.*
- III. _____

4. Thesis: *Computers have benefited society in different ways.*

Topic sentence:

- I. *Operations are made faster.*
- II. *Fewer workers are needed, saving money for employers.*
- III. _____

5. Thesis: *There are advantages to stopping smoking.*

Topic sentence:

- I. *You can have a better social life.*
- II. *You can get back your self-esteem.*
- III. _____

The Conclusion

The final paragraph, or conclusion, should make the reader feel that you have completed what you set out to do in your thesis statement. The conclusion is often introduced or signaled for the reader by a transition, such as “in conclusion,” “to sum up,” or “thus.”

What you say in the conclusion depends on what you developed in your essay. However, here are some points to consider in writing a standard conclusion.

A conclusion consists of:

- a restatement of the thesis in different words.

or

- a restatement of the main points of the essay and a final comment on the subject, based on what you have written. Do not, however, bring up a new topic in the conclusion.

Read the following introduction and the sample concluding paragraph.

There is a difference between being an onlooker and being a true observer of art. Onlookers just walk by a work of art, letting their eyes record it while their minds are elsewhere. They have no true appreciation of art. Observers, on the other hand, are informed and appreciative. They have spent the time and energy to educate themselves so that art will be meaningful. They don't just exist side by side with art, they live with it and are aware of its existence in even the smallest part of their daily lives.

In conclusion, onlookers are unaware and unappreciative of the art surrounding them in their daily lives. Observers, having educated themselves, are able to admire, enjoy, and appreciate art at any level, from a bold and imaginative magazine advertisement to an architecturally classic public building to an Impressionist painting in an art museum. Rather than allow the rich visual world to slip by them, observers pause to let their eyes and minds absorb artistic images of all kinds. Their deep appreciation of artistic expression stretches their intellectual and emotional experiences, thus opening up new areas of enjoyment.

Exercise 4

Read the following introduction and write your own concluding paragraphs.

1. What is art? People in the past always thought they knew what art was. Today, however, art is harder to define. Art in this century is far more complex, for several different reasons. People are exposed to the art of many times and cultures. Much of modern art is difficult to classify. And to further complicate things, we now have works of art created in media undreamed of a few decades ago, including electronic images that may disappear within moments of their creation. It's no wonder that people are asking what exactly art is and isn't, and how we can tell the difference.

2. "The only difference between me and a madman is that I am not mad," said Salvador Dali, probably the most famous Surrealist artist. Like many other modern artists, such as Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Much, and Jean Dubuffet, Dali was interested in the relationship between madness and creativity. Certainly the works of these artists, with their swirling lines, strange scenes and fantastic dreamlike quality, appear to be the products of unstable minds. Van Gogh produced a whole body of work while in an asylum, so the question of whether madness contributed to his work, and might even have been the force behind it, is a valid one. Where does creativity end and madness begin? Is the line that separates them so thin as to be unrecognizable? These are questions that must be explored in any study of the relationship between madness and creativity in the world of art.

ESSAY

I. INTRODUCTION

General Statements

Thesis Statement

II. BODY

A. Topic Sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support
'(Concluding Sentence)¹

B. Topic Sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support
(Concluding Sentence)

C. Topic Sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support
(Concluding Sentence)

III. CONCLUSION

Restatement or summary
of the main points;
final comment

PARAGRAPH

Topic Sentence

A. Support

B. Support

C. Support

Concluding Sentence

¹ Concluding sentences for body paragraphs in an essay are not always necessary.

Introductory Paragraph

Introduction
Thesis statement
Plan of development:
Points 1, 2, 3

The *introduction* attracts the reader's interest. The *thesis statement* (or *thesis sentence*) states the main idea advanced in the paper.

The *plan of development* is a list of points that support the thesis. The points are presented in the order in which they will be developed in the paper.

First Supporting Paragraph

Topic sentence (point 1)
Specific evidence

The *topic sentence* advances the first supporting point for the thesis, and the *specific evidence* in the rest of the paragraph develops that first point.

Second Supporting Paragraph

Topic sentence (point 2)
Specific evidence

The *topic sentence* advances the second supporting point for the thesis, and the *specific evidence* in the rest of the paragraph develops that second point.

Third Supporting Paragraph

Topic sentence (point 3)
Specific evidence

The *topic sentence* advances the third supporting point for the thesis, and the *specific evidence* in the rest of the paragraph develops that third point.

Concluding Paragraph

Summary, conclusion,
or both

A *summary* is a brief restatement of the thesis and its main points. A *conclusion* is a final thought or two stemming from the subject of the paper.

FORM FOR PLANNING AN ESSAY

To write an effective essay, first prepare an outline, using a form like the one below.

THESIS STATEMENT _____

Topic Sentence 1 _____

Specific _____

Supporting _____

Evidence _____

Topic Sentence 2 _____

Specific _____

Supporting _____

Evidence _____

Topic Sentence 3 _____

Specific _____

Supporting _____

Evidence _____

Summary and/or Closing Remarks _____

I. Topic Sentence: _____

II. Support

A. Major support # 1: _____

1. Minor detail # 1 _____

a. Specific example # 1 _____

b. Specific example # 2 _____

B. Major support # 2 _____

1. Minor detail # 1 _____

2. Minor detail # 2 _____

C. Major support # 3 _____

1. Minor detail # 1 _____

2. Minor detail # 2 _____

3. Minor detail # 3 _____

III. Conclusion