

Five Paragraph Outline

A classic composition format is the five-paragraph essay. It is not the only format for writing an essay, of course; however, it is a useful tool for you to use and adapt, especially as you begin to develop your compositions skills.

Writing an outline allows you to organize your main thoughts into single segments and establish the order in which information will be written. Usually, most academic essays are written in 5 paragraphs. The essay outline template provided will contain main points that will be addressed within your work. As a writer, you should use those points to construct a logical and coherent flow of ideas that will build off of one another to strengthen your overall argument. The outline is a tool that you will use to assist you in the construction of an essay draft.

Below is a sample showing the basic elements of a five-paragraph essay. After looking at these basic elements, we will discuss how to apply these elements to an outline.

Basic Elements

Paragraph 1: Introduction

The introductory paragraph should include the following elements:

1. A hook to get reader's attention is how an essay begins and usually comprises the first. Try to begin with a specific image or detail, a statistic, a story, a shocking fact, a quote, a refutation of a common belief, etc.

2. Next, providing background information is necessary so that your readers can understand the context of your thesis.

3. A thesis statement is necessary. This indicates your paper's topic and makes your paper's purpose clear.

**Note: some professors may require a plan of development (also known as a road map), which outlines the order of points in an essay. The plan of development can be in the same sentence as the thesis or in a different sentence. Keep in mind, however, that some professors may not want to see any plan of development. Be sure to specify all thesis requirements with your professor before submitting*

Paragraphs 2-4: Body Paragraphs

A body paragraph should include the following elements:

1. A **topic sentence** which explains the main, supporting point of the paragraph is the first sentence of each body paragraph. The topic sentence gives an overview of the paragraph and relates back to the thesis.

2. **Sub points/supporting details** represent the main point of the paragraph. The purpose of sub points is to support the topic sentence of the paragraph.

3. These sub points themselves are supported by **examples**. Examples provide evidence for your topic sentence, and ultimately your thesis; they consist of facts, details, statistics, personal observation, experience, and expert opinions.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

The conclusion should include the following elements:

1. The conclusion begins with the restatement of the **thesis statement**.

2. **Closing remarks**. There are many possible ways to close an essay. One common method is to tie back to the hook (if the hook is a story, you can tell part of it in the intro and finish it in the conclusion). Another commonly used tool is to recommend an action or prompt your reader towards an action with a question.

Outlining

After looking at these basic elements of a 5 paragraph essay, the implementation of these elements will be applied to an outline.

Alphanumeric outlining is the most commonly used outline format. This formatting uses characters and numbers to organize and structure paragraphs, main points, sub points, and smaller supporting details. Alphanumeric outlining uses numbers and characters in the following order: Roman numerals, capitalized letters, Arabic numerals, and lowercase letters.

Outlining can be done in complete sentences, or it can be done just using key words and phrases.

Blank Outline Sample

- I. Introduction
 - A. Hook
 - B. Background
 - C. Thesis
- II. Topic sentence for body paragraph 1
 - A. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - B. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - C. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
- III. Topic sentence for body paragraph 2
 - A. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - B. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - C. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
- IV. Topic sentence for body paragraph 3
 - A. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - B. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - C. Sub point/supporting detail
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
- V. Conclusion
 - A. Restate thesis
 - B. Closing remarks

Outline Sample

Adapted from a sample provided by Austin Community College

I. Introduction

- A. Hook (Frederick Douglass quotation): “Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground.”
- B. Background
 - 1. Biographic info about Douglass
 - 2. Abolition movement
- C. Thesis: Frederick Douglass played a crucial role in securing the abolition of slavery and equality of African American rights through his actions, ideas, and efforts as a lecturer, author/publisher, and politician.

II. Douglass as Lecturer

- A. History as slave and acquisition of education
 - 1. He “experienced slavery”
 - 2. Literacy allowed expression
- B. Early lectures, including initial speech before Garrison
 - 1. Success of initial speech
 - 2. Goals for future speeches
- C. Effect of lectures on society
 - 1. Open eyes
 - 2. Encourage activism

III. Douglass as Author/Publisher

- A. *Narrative*'s success and effect
 - 1. Springboard for paper
- B. Goals/hopes for paper
- C. Garrison set-back and significance
- D. Significance of Paper

IV. Douglass as Politician

- A. Key trait for success
- B. Goal of political activism
- C. Efforts for Republican party
 - 1. Significance of efforts
- D. Black soldier enlistment crusade
- E. Joining of Republican party
 - 1. Significance of efforts

V. Conclusion

- A. Restate thesis
- B. Closing remark (reference quote from hook): Douglass worked hard, plowing the ground for the seeds of freedom.