

Organization

Basic Essay Format

A basic essay consists of three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. This basic essay format will help you to write and organize an essay. However, flexibility is important. While keeping this basic essay format in mind, let the topic and specific assignment guide the writing and organization.

PARTS OF AN ESSAY

INTRODUCTION

The introduction guides your reader into the paper by grabbing attention and introducing the topic. It should begin with a *hook* that catches the reader's interest. This could be a quote, an analogy, a question, etc. After getting the reader's attention, the introduction should give some background information on the topic. The ideas within the introduction should begin as very general and gradually get more specific until it ends with the thesis statement. (See the *Introductions* handout for further information.)

THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement states concisely the main idea of the essay, sets limits on the topic, and indicates the organization of the essay. The thesis works as a road map for the entire essay, showing the readers what you have to say and how you will support your ideas.

BODY

The body of the essay supports the main points of the thesis. Each point is developed by one or more paragraphs and supported with specific details.

These details include support from books, articles, websites, personal experiences, etc. In addition to this research or support, the author's own analysis and discussion of the topic is important. This is what ties ideas together and draws conclusions that support the thesis. The body paragraphs should be organized according to the order of ideas set forth in the thesis statement. Refer to "Parts of a Paragraph" below for further information on writing effective body paragraphs.

TRANSITIONS

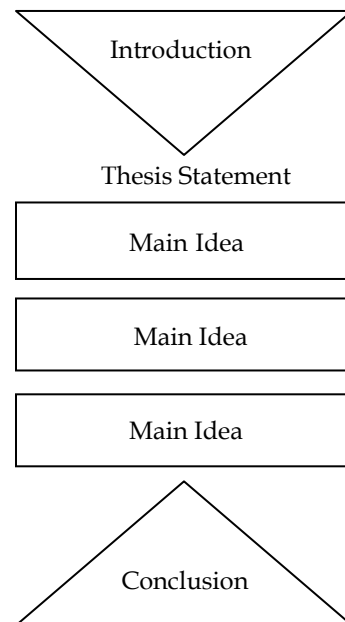
Transitions help paragraphs connect to each other and to the thesis. They are used both within and between paragraphs to help the paper flow from one topic to the next. These transitions can be one or two words (*First, Next, In addition*, etc.) or one or two sentences that bring the reader to the next main point. The topic sentence of a paragraph often serves as a transition. (See the *Transitions* handout for further information.)

CONCLUSION

The conclusion brings together all the main points of the essay. It refers back to and restates the thesis statement. The conclusion leaves readers with a final thought and sense of closure by resolving any ideas brought up in the essay. In the conclusion, new topics or ideas that were not developed in the paper should not be introduced. (See the *Conclusions* handout for further information.)

CITATIONS

If your paper incorporates research, be sure to give credit to each source. In-text citations and a *Works Cited/References/Bibliography* page will help ensure that you do not plagiarize. Refer to the *MLA Format*, *APA Format*, or *Turabian Format* handout for help with this.



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PARTS OF A PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is a portion of the essay that discusses one idea in detail and supports the thesis or main idea of the essay. Each paragraph in the body of the paper should include a topic sentence, supporting details to support the topic sentence, and a concluding sentence. The paragraph's purpose and scope will determine its length, but paragraphs must contain at least two complete sentences. For more information on this topic, see the *Basic Paragraph Format* handout.

TOPIC SENTENCE

The main idea of each paragraph is stated in a topic sentence that shows how the idea relates to the thesis. Generally, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph, but the location and placement may vary with individual organization and audience expectation. Topic sentences often serve as transitions between paragraphs.

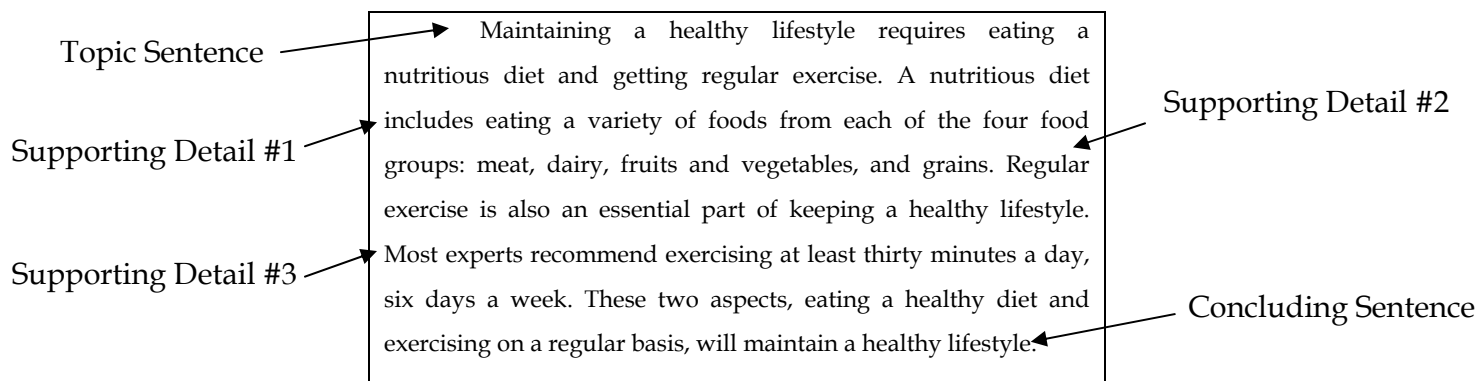
SUPPORTING DETAILS

Supporting details elaborate upon and prove the topic sentences and thesis. Supporting details should be drawn from a variety of sources including books, interviews, experiences, etc. plus the author's analysis.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

Each paragraph should end with a final statement that brings together the ideas brought up in the paragraph and emphasizes the main idea one last time.

EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH



UNITY AND COHERENCE

Proper essay and paragraph format helps to achieve unity and coherence and enhance the reader's understanding. Using well-worded topic sentences and concluding sentences will help maintain unity and coherence throughout the essay.

- ❖ **Unity** is the continuity of a single idea (the thesis) throughout the essay. Each detail and example should develop logically and refer back to the original focus.
- ❖ **Coherence** means that each point should be linked to the previous and following points to help the essay flow and progress logically and clearly. An easy way to link paragraphs together is through transitions in each paragraph's topic sentence.