# **Structure of an Essay**

The following guidelines to strengthen your knowledge of this preliminary essay format. Five-paragraph essays are incredibly useful in two situations — when writers are just starting out and when a writing assignment is timed.

An **outline** is often used to demonstrate the content of most five-paragraph essays:

1. Introduction
2. Body
   1. First Point Paragraph
   2. Second Point Paragraph
   3. Third Point Paragraph
3. Conclusion

The five-paragraph essay has three basic parts: **introduction**, **body**, and **conclusion**.

The **Introduction** is the first paragraph of the essay, and it serves several purposes. This paragraph gets your reader's attention, develops the basic ideas of what you will cover, and provides the thesis statement for the essay. The [thesis statement](https://www.jscc.edu/academics/programs/writing-center/writing-resources/thesis-statements.html)is usually only one sentence and is made up of the **topic, focus**, and **three main points** of the essay.

Each **body** paragraph should start with a **transition** — either a word or phrase, like *First*, or *Another important point is*. Then, the first sentence should continue with your topic sentence. The [**topic sentence**](https://www.jscc.edu/academics/programs/writing-center/writing-resources/topic-sentences.html)tells your reader what the paragraph is about, like a smaller-level thesis statement. The rest of the paragraph will be made of supporting sentences. These sentences, at least four of them, will explain your topic sentence to your reader.

Be sure that each sentence in the paragraph directly addresses both your topic sentence and your thesis statement. If you have a point to make that is not directly connected to the topic sentence, it does not belong in the paragraph. You might write a different paragraph on that other point, but you may not stick it into any old paragraph just because you thought of it at that point. (You can't stick a red towel into a load of white laundry without causing damage to the rest of the clothes, and you can't stick a point that' off-topic into a paragraph without doing damage to the rest of the essay. Keep your laundry and your paragraph points separate!)

The **conclusion** is the last paragraph of the essay. This paragraph brings the essay to **a close, reminds** the reader of the basic ideas from the essay, and restates the thesis statement. The conclusion should not contain new ideas, as it is the summation of the content of the essay. The restatement of the thesis is a simpler form that the one originally presented in the introduction.

# **Thesis Statements**

A thesis statement has three basic parts: ***topic****,****focus***, and ***supporting elements***. Depending on what kind of paper you are writing, the way these parts are put together may vary slightly. Writing a thesis statement begins with understanding your topic and what kind of essay/paper you are writing. Knowing the audience for your work is also an important detail in thesis statement writing. For example, if you are writing a persuasive essay, it is important to know the audience you are trying to persuade.

Whether you choose the topic or it is chosen for you, critically consider ideas you can potentially write about as you work your way into a thesis statement. Ask questions about your topic and use the answers to narrow the focus of what you will include in your essay. If you are stuck, try using the **5 W's and the 1 H: Who? What? When? Where? Why?**and**How ?**

# **Guidelines for Thesis Statements**:

# State the outcome of your essay, not just your intention to investigate (avoid “this essay will”, “this essay intends to”, or “I will”)

* Give a short summary of the reasons for your outcome (“because”, “as”, “due to”) in the same sentence
* Keep the thesis statement clear and specific; avoid language such as “perhaps” and “may” and don't give too much detail (that's what the rest of the essay is for!)
* The thesis statement is short: in most essays, one sentence is all you need
* The thesis statement should be realistic: don't exaggerate or overstate your position
* Make sure that your thesis statement answers the essay question directly.

**Guidelines for Body Paragraphs in an Essay**

Paragraphs contain three main sections: Body paragraphs will often begin with a summary of the controlling idea: the point (also known as the topic sentence). The point (or topic) sentence summarizes the paragraph in the same way that the thesis statement summarizes the whole essay. The rest of the paragraph supports that main point (the topic sentence), by explaining it in detail, giving an example, or citing evidence that reinforces it.

**PIE** (which stands for *Point / Illustration/Explanation*) may be helpful to remember as a guide for developing well-structured, coherent paragraphs. Academic paragraphs are usually at least three sentences long, but can be longer. However, don't make those sentences too long. As a rough guide, a sentence longer than three lines is too long.

**Point:** All paragraphs should be focus and discuss only one major point. That point should connect with the overall focus of the essay The major point of a paragraph is often called the *controlling idea*. *Every paragraph should have a different controlling idea, each one discussing one aspect or part of the overall essay.*

**Illustration:** The largest part of any body paragraph is the illustration, which consists of explanations, supportive evidence and examples. Illustrations use logic to fully explain the main point raised in the topic sentence. It is not enough to just explain an idea, however: you need to show that outside evidence supports it as well.   
The illustration can include

* Published opinions
* Research from books, journal articles, websites, etc.
* Published case studies
* Research data

**Illustration must be relevant to the topic and it must be used and credited properly.** **Outside sources can be quoted, summarized, or paraphrased. For information on the right and wrong ways to do this, see quoting and paraphrasing. Crediting outside sources is known as referencing, and is described in detail in the section titled introduction to referencing.**

**Explanation**: The explanation should clarify how the reader should interpret your illustrative evidence and also how the paragraph's controlling idea works to support the thesis statement. It may also discuss the significance of your explanation. Remember that body paragraphs do not exist in isolation.. *Transitions* show the connections between paragraphs themselves, and the connections between the paragraphs and the overall focus of the essay. They often appear at the end of a paragraph.

Transitions are essential for maintaining momentum in your essay and showing the reader how all the ideas fit together. They are described in detail in the next section, essay flow.