

Essay Structure Guidelines

- The **introduction** should begin by discussing your main topic in a more general manner than your thesis (something that the reader can relate to) and then moving toward your specific argument about the topic in the thesis, which is usually the last or second to last sentence(s) in the introduction paragraph. This paragraph should be significantly shorter than your body paragraphs.
- The **thesis** should include your topic, argument, and subtopics (which do NOT have to be three in number or correspond to only one paragraph). The thesis sets up the overall structure of the essay and, as such, is extremely important. When you begin writing, don't worry about getting the thesis precisely right. Instead, think about your first thesis as a working thesis that will change as you write the essay and develop your ideas.
- The **body paragraphs** should develop a subtopic or part of a subtopic and can be any number. The three body paragraphs of the traditional five paragraph essay are an outdated requirement and not recommended for this course. However, you must consider the length of your essay when deciding how to organize your subtopics into paragraphs. For example, having nine paragraphs in two pages is NOT a good idea because each paragraph will be too small to explore any idea in depth. Since your thesis is always some sort of an argument, each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that makes an argument about the subtopic or part of a subtopic that it is dealing with. This topic sentence works the same way for the paragraph that the thesis works for the overall essay -- it provides structure. Each body paragraph should include some sort of quotation from the text to back up the argument -- think of quotations as your evidence. The paragraph should end with a concluding sentence that both draws to a close its paragraph and transitions to the next.

A good general paragraph structure to follow would be something along the lines of argumentative topic sentence, introduction of supporting quotation, supporting quotation, close reading of quotation in terms of argument, and then concluding argumentative sentence (this is, of course, only one possible structure -- I don't expect you to follow this exactly).

- The **conclusion** should begin by stating the thesis with a difference. This difference comes from the argument that you have developed in your body paragraphs. Then the conclusion applies the specific argument of the thesis to a larger context. However, be careful not to end with a "save the world" sentence. The conclusion should be short and sweet and only about three sentences in the case of two to three page papers.