

# Basic Essay and Paragraph Format

*Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.*

A basic essay consists of three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. Following this format will help you 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 introducing the topic. It should begin with a hook that catches the reader's interest. This hook 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 be general enough for the reader to understand the main claim and gradually become more specific to lead into the thesis statement. (See the Introductions handout for further information.)

### Thesis Statement

The thesis statement concisely states the main idea or argument of the essay, sets limits on the topic, and can indicate 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 which main points you will use to support your ideas. (See the Thesis Statements handout.)

### Body

The body of the essay supports the main points presented in the thesis. Each point is developed by one or more paragraphs and supported with specific details. These details can include support from research and experiences, depending on the assignment. In addition to this support, the author's own analysis and discussion of the topic ties ideas together and draws conclusions that support the thesis. Refer to "Parts of a Paragraph" below for further information on writing effective body paragraphs.

### Transitions

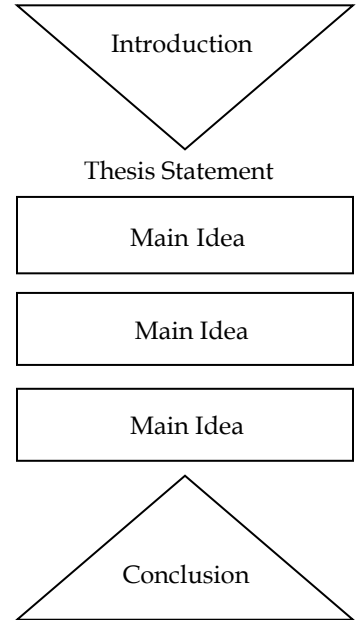
Transitions connect paragraphs to each other and to the thesis. They are used within and between paragraphs to help the paper flow from one topic to the next. These transitions can be one or two words ("first," "next," "in addition," etc.) or one or two sentences that bring the reader to the next main 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 the thesis statement and leaves readers with a final thought and sense of closure by resolving any ideas brought up in the essay. It may also address the implications of the argument. 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 using in-text citations and a *Works Cited/References/Bibliography* page. Refer to the *MLA Format*, *APA Format*, or *Turabian Format* handout for help with this.



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## Parts of a Paragraph

In an essay, a paragraph discusses one idea in detail that supports the thesis 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 most paragraphs 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 according to individual organization and audience expectation. Topic sentences often serve as transitions between paragraphs.

### Supporting Details

Supporting details elaborate upon the topic sentences and thesis. Supporting details should be drawn from a variety of sources determined by the assignment guidelines and genre, and should include the writer's own analysis.

- Expert Opinion
- Facts and Statistics
- Personal Experiences
- Others' Experiences
- Brief Stories
- Research Studies
- Your Own Analysis
- Interviews

### Concluding Sentence

Each paragraph should end with a final statement that brings together the ideas brought up in the paragraph. Sometimes, it can serve as a transition to the next paragraph.

### Topic Sentence

### Supporting Detail #1

### Supporting Detail #2

### Concluding Sentence

The root cause of childhood Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is difficult to determine, since many biological, genetic, and environmental factors may contribute. While genetics can help explain the prevalence of ADD in children and families, they do not necessarily explain its cause (Winger, 2012). Environmental factors such as social interaction, attachment, and other factors can also play a huge role in the development of ADD but are not necessarily its root, according to Graymond (2011, p. 33). Research suggests that genetic and environmental interactions may both be important in conditioning the risk of ADD as well as its severity and progression. In the classic question of "nature v. nurture," in this case, the answer appears to be both.

## Unity and Coherence

Proper essay and paragraph format not only helps to achieve unity and coherence but also enhances the reader's understanding. Well-worded topic sentences and concluding sentences will also help maintain unity 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.