

Tips for a Fabulous Academic Essay

Sample Structure, often called “5 part” or “5 paragraph” essay:

1. Introductory paragraph. Thesis statement is often the last sentence of the paragraph and tells reader what essay is “about” and what your argument is.
2. Topic sentence and support
3. Topic sentence and support
4. Topic sentence and support
5. Concluding paragraph. Often, the thesis is restated and the main points of the paper are summarized.

Of course, academic essays will often be longer than five paragraphs!

While you may find it helpful to stick to three main points (and in a 4-5 page essay, it is unwise to attempt to prove more than 3 or 4!), you should have several paragraphs to support each point.

You can use **transition words or sentences** to link the paragraphs together (words like “therefore,” “however,” “in the same way,” etc). Shorter paragraphs that transition from discussion of one major point to another can also be used (see p. 108 of S&S for an example of a transitional paragraph).

Introduction: Like any piece of writing, in an academic essay you want to get your reader’s attention. Sometimes a brief vignette or story is used. Other times, a strong statement of opinion or a statistic is effective (“Researchers estimate the average child in America watches ten hours of television every week”).

Your thesis sentence should be clear and simple: simply state what the main idea or argument of your paper will be. In formal research papers, this is often the only time it is appropriate to use “I” (“I will argue that watching too much television contributes to child obesity in America”).

Supporting (“body”) paragraphs: Each paragraph should begin, conclude, or infer a topic sentence. A topic sentence tells the reader what the main idea of the paragraph is (see p. 85-6 of S&S Handbook). An effective paragraph should have the following attributes: unity, development, and coherence. Check for unity by asking yourself the following questions: Does the topic sentence support the thesis? Do all the sentences in the paragraph support the topic sentence? Is there enough detail to prove my point? Are appropriate examples from the text used? Does each sentence flow smoothly after each other?

Conclusion: Never introduce a “new idea” in the conclusion. Doing so will leave your reader frustrated and confused as to what the essay is about! Instead, compose a strong conclusion by restating your thesis, your main points, and/or by reiterating the most important point of your paper. Often, a successful conclusion ties in with the introduction somehow. For example, if you begin your paper by telling a story about your own television consumption as a child, you can conclude by telling the rest of the story or by referring back to this vignette.

Developed by Kayla Walker Edin, © 2006

Reference for page numbers:

Troyka & Hesse. Handbook for Writers. 7th ed. Simon & Schuster, NJ: 2005.