

Traditional Academic Essays In Three Parts

Part I: The Introduction

An introduction is usually the first paragraph of your academic essay. If you're writing a long essay, you might need 2 or 3 paragraphs to introduce your topic to your reader. A good introduction does 2 things:

1. **Gets the reader's attention.** You can get a reader's attention by telling a story, providing a statistic, pointing out something strange or interesting, providing and discussing an interesting quote, etc. Be interesting and find some original angle via which to engage others in your topic.
2. **Provides a specific and debatable thesis statement.** The thesis statement is usually just one sentence long, but it might be longer—even a whole paragraph—if the essay you're writing is long. A good thesis statement makes a *debatable point*, meaning a point someone might disagree with and argue against. It also serves as a *roadmap* for what you argue in your paper.

Part II: The Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs help you prove your thesis and move you along a compelling trajectory from your introduction to your conclusion. If your thesis is a simple one, you might not need a lot of body paragraphs to prove it. If it's more complicated, you'll need more body paragraphs. An easy way to remember the parts of a body paragraph is to think of them as the *MEAT* of your essay:

Main Idea. The part of a topic sentence that states the main idea of the body paragraph. All of the sentences in the paragraph connect to it. Keep in mind that main ideas are...

- *like labels.* They appear in the first sentence of the paragraph and tell your reader what's inside the paragraph.
- *arguable.* They're *not* statements of fact; they're *debatable points* that you prove with evidence.
- *focused.* Make a specific point in each paragraph and then prove that point.

Evidence. The parts of a paragraph that prove the main idea. You might include different types of evidence in different sentences. Keep in mind that *different disciplines have different ideas about what counts as evidence and they adhere to different citation styles.* Examples of evidence include...

- *quotations and/or paraphrases from sources.*
- *facts,* e.g. statistics or findings from studies you've conducted.
- *narratives and/or descriptions,* e.g. of your own experiences.

Analysis. The parts of a paragraph that explain the evidence. Make sure you tie the evidence you provide back to the paragraph's main idea. In other words, discuss the evidence.

Transition. The part of a paragraph that helps you move fluidly from the last paragraph. Transitions appear in topic sentences along with main ideas, and they look both backward and forward in order to help you connect your ideas for your reader. Don't end paragraphs with transitions; start with them.

Keep in mind that MEAT does not occur in that order. The "Transition" and the "Main Idea" often combine to form the first sentence—the topic sentence—and then paragraphs contain multiple sentences of evidence and analysis. *For example,* a paragraph might look like this: **TM. E. E. A. E. E. A. A.**

Part III: The Conclusion

A conclusion is the last paragraph of your essay, or, if you're writing a really long essay, you might need 2 or 3 paragraphs to conclude. A conclusion typically does one of two things—or, of course, it can do both:

1. **Summarizes the argument.** Some instructors expect you not to say anything new in your conclusion. They just want you to restate your main points. Especially if you've made a long and complicated argument, it's useful to restate your main points for your reader by the time you've gotten to your conclusion. If you opt to do so, keep in mind that you should use different language than you used in your introduction and your body paragraphs. The introduction and conclusion shouldn't be the same.
2. **Explains the significance of the argument.** Some instructors want you to avoid restating your main points; they instead want you to explain your argument's significance. In other words, they want you to **answer the “so what” question** by giving your reader a clearer sense of why your argument matters.
 - For example, your argument might be significant to studies of a certain *time period*.
 - Alternately, it might be significant to a certain *geographical region*.
 - Alternately still, it might influence how your readers think about *the future*. You might even opt to speculate about the future and/or *call your readers to action* in your conclusion.