

Essay Structure Checklist

Student Name: _____ Essay Title: _____

Introductory Paragraph:

In a short essay, the first paragraph serves as a way for you to introduce your reader to your main idea. It often starts with a general statement which lets the reader know the nature of the subject to be discussed. Then, after a few narrowing sentences, it presents the reader with your limited thesis sentence. This approach gives the reader time to adjust to your focus. It also gives you a short time in which to grab the reader's attention.

⇒ *Items to check in your introductory paragraph:*

- Use the introduction to set the tone of your paper. **Start the introductory paragraph with a topic sentence that states generally what you will write about.**
- Follow the topic sentence with sentences that discuss the topic sentence.
- Do not include your support or explanations in the introductory paragraph. Those come later.
- Make the introductory paragraph proportional in size to the rest of the paper. The shorter the total paper, the shorter the introductory paragraph.
- Do not use statements such as, "In this paper I shall attempt to prove that . . ." or, "In my opinion . . ."
- Write your thesis sentence as the last sentence in the introductory paragraph.** When writing your thesis statement, use a transitional phrase such as "Therefore" or "Thus" to start the thesis statement.

Body Paragraphs:

The body is the long middle section of the essay. It consists of one or more paragraphs. The job of body paragraphs is to give support and explanation. Whatever the thesis promises or needs (an explanation, an argument, a description), the body must deliver.

⇒ *Items to check in your body paragraphs:*

- Each body paragraph must have a topic sentence that establishes the point of the paragraph and that responds to the essay's thesis.**
- Each body paragraph must do something to help the overall main idea (thesis). Broadly speaking, body paragraphs must explain the main idea, describe it, or argue for or against it.
- The body must be as specific and concrete as you can make it. Vagueness and useless repetition are deadly.
- The body must end up with a sensible arrangement of its paragraphs.

Concluding Paragraph:

The work of explaining and supporting the thesis is over when you come to the end of the body. But in an essay, an added last paragraph serves as a way for you to end the paper smoothly. It allows you to reinforce your main idea and to conclude things neatly.

⇒ *Items to check in your concluding paragraph:*

- Use the first sentence of the concluding paragraph to repeat the idea of the topic of the introductory paragraph.** Although you will repeat or reinforce the same main idea which the introduction gave, do not use exactly the same words.
- Let the discussion sentences in the concluding paragraph return the reader to each of the body paragraphs. Each discussion sentence in the concluding paragraph should briefly summarize a body paragraph. This will tie all of the paragraphs together into one unified essay.
- Do not start the concluding paragraph with statements such as, "In conclusion . . ." or, "In this paper I have attempted to prove that . . ."
- Use the last sentence of the concluding paragraph to repeat the idea of your thesis sentence.** Although you will repeat or reinforce the same main idea which the introduction gave, do not use exactly the same words. When writing your concluding sentence, always use a transitional phrase such as "Therefore" or "Thus" to start the sentence.

Always use strong sentences in your essay that leave no room for doubt in the reader.