

Introduction:

- Interesting, general opening—something more than restating the question
- Explanation of terms & ideas unfamiliar to the reader
- Leads to thesis—introduction ends with thesis

Thesis:

- Concise—one sentence
- A supportable assertion—not fact or isolated opinion; should explain why or how.
- Suggests organization of paper—list of three, cause and effect, etc.
- Key words are carefully chosen to focus and limit the scope of the essay.

Body:

- Each body paragraph should focus on one aspect of the thesis statement.
- Topic sentences identify the aspect being examined by using key words from the thesis.
- Abstract ideas and unclear concepts should be defined and explored as necessary.
- Specific examples should support the assertion made in the topic sentence; those examples should be as specific as possible and/or necessary. In the case of literary essays, that may include quotations and paraphrases but generally not summaries.
- The example needs to be analyzed. The writer should explain how the example proves the thesis, using the key words from the topic sentence and the thesis.
- If the analysis does not give a sense of closure, the last sentence of the paragraph can clearly identify the point of the paragraph.

Conclusion:

- Restate thesis, but quickly and concisely; do not list aspects again.
- Provide new information or connection that shows the writer's complete mastery of subject matter.
- Attempt to achieve some emotional impact.

Other concepts:

- Don't make the "ignorant reader assumption."
- When writing about literature, remember to write in the present tense about the action of the literature.
- Your essay should be interesting, showing your own insights into the subject.
- Transitions can be used to show the movement between ideas between and within paragraphs.
- While the style of the essay is generally formal, it should also be clear, direct and readable. Use vocabulary appropriate to the subject matter (technical language, etc.).
- Avoid phrases like "I think," etc.; try to sound mature and confident.
- Some common grammatical errors students make are comma splices, misspellings of homonyms, complex subject/verb disagreement, improper dealing with titles of literary works and incorrect punctuation of quotations.
- The quality of an essay almost always relates directly to the process the writer used to produce it. Early planning, multiple drafts and major revisions are required to produce strong, insightful essays.