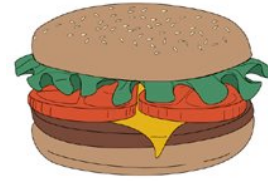


## The 5 Paragraph Essay

It's a bit like fast food...



We are going to be writing a literary essay on *Flowers for Algernon*. The first thing you need to do is to write a thesis statement. Your essay should have paragraphs – either four or 5 of them. It should contain a clear thesis contained in an introduction, 2 or 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion in which you restate the thesis. Your body paragraphs should contain examples from the text that support your answer/thesis. Each body paragraph should have roughly 5 sentences. If you think about how a hamburger is stacked up (ahem, veggie burger for you non-carnivores) that can provide you with a good metaphor for “building” a strong essay. But let’s take it one step at a time.

### The Thesis Statement:

The thesis statement is, quite simply, the controlling idea for your entire essay. Everything in your essay should be there to support – either directly or indirectly – your thesis statement. You may think of the thesis statement in the form of an equation:

$$\text{THESIS} = \text{SUBJECT} + \text{OPINION}$$

In this particular case, you will be using *Flowers for Algernon* and the essay question I provided to write a thoughtful essay using the text to support your thesis statement. You should look at the short answers you wrote yesterday and choose one that you want to expand into a literary essay. Then, you should craft a thesis statement. Trying to write an essay without a thesis statement is a little like trying to drive somewhere you have never been before without directions, or like trying to build a house before you build the foundation.

### The Introduction:

This should be short and to the point. You should create a strong thesis by stating the title or titles of the pieces you read and the character, person or topic and turn the question/writing prompt in a statement – this should be, you guessed it, the answer to the question/prompt. Create a glimpse of what’s coming up (like a movie trailer) by briefly mentioning what will be coming up in each of your body paragraphs.

For example, if the question is: *Many people point to “Flowers for Algernon” as a science fiction story that raises questions about the role intelligence plays in human life. Write an essay in which you discuss whether the story makes a definitive statement about the role of intelligence in human life, or whether it simply explores this idea as an open-ended question. Discuss at least two examples from the story to support your answer.*

Your introduction could be something like this:

*Scientists have long attempted to measure and understand human intelligence. In “Flowers for Algernon”, author Daniel Keyes raises a number of questions about the role intelligence plays in human life. Rather than give a definitive answer, Keyes’ story explores this idea as an open-ended question. Various examples from the text indicate that Keyes offers suggestions to the reader that Charlie experiences advantages and disadvantages both before his surgery and after he becomes a genius.*

The paragraph has an **opening statement, a thesis statement, and a transition statement**. The opening statement hooks the reader and introduces the topic.

### **The Body Paragraphs:**

Now that you have the structure of your Introduction, you should move on to the body paragraphs of your paper. This paper should have 2 or 3 body paragraphs. Remember, the purpose of this paper is answer the question or address the prompt provided for you. Frequently, the number of bullets provided as part of the question/prompt will help you decide how many paragraphs you need. A compare and contrast could use 2 or 3.

Each paragraph should have a core structure. You can deviate from this structure as you go, but if you find yourself getting stuck and do not know what to write next, this will help you. Further, this structure will help keep your paper focused.

First, decide whether your paragraph is going to have one or two core facts. We call these *Concrete Details*. A paragraph with one core fact, or example, is a five sentence paragraph we call a *One Chunk Paragraph*. A paragraph with two core facts or examples is an eight sentence paragraph we call a *Two Chunk Paragraph*. Let’s take a look:

### **One Chunk Paragraph:**

|           |                         |                                                                                                                                                      |                                                     |
|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>TS</b> | <b>Topic Sentence</b>   | Contains the main idea of your paragraph. What’s it’s about.                                                                                         | This part is arguable, it is often controversial.   |
| <b>CD</b> | <b>Concrete Detail</b>  | This is a fact. An example from your research that illustrates what you said in your topic sentence.                                                 | You might start this sentence with “For Example...” |
| <b>CM</b> | <b>Commentary</b>       | This is your opinion on how that fact or example proves what you are saying.                                                                         | You might start with “This shows...”                |
| <b>CM</b> | <b>Commentary</b>       | Another sentence that proves how the example you provided proves what you are saying.                                                                | “In addition or Furthermore...”                     |
| <b>CS</b> | <b>Closing Sentence</b> | This should re-state the topic sentence in some form. It is also a transition sentence that finishes the idea and transitions to the next paragraph. | “Because of this...”                                |

If you notice, each paragraph is like a mini-essay unto itself. The topic sentence is like the thesis statement of your paper. The middle sections are like the body paragraphs and the closing sentence is like a conclusion. You are simply focusing on one idea per paragraph that supports your overall thesis for your paper. Remember the hamburger metaphor? Think of each paragraph that way:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>TS – Topic Sentence (The top bun)</b></p> <p><b>CD – Concrete Detail (The Meat)</b></p> <p><b>CM – Commentary (Lettuce &amp; Tomato)</b><br/> <b>CM – Commentary (Cheese)</b></p> <p><b>CD – Closing Sentence (Bottom Bun)</b></p> |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Remember, good writers use transition words and phrases to help their readers connect ideas. Remember to mix them up to keep your writing interesting and flowing. Try words and phrases like:

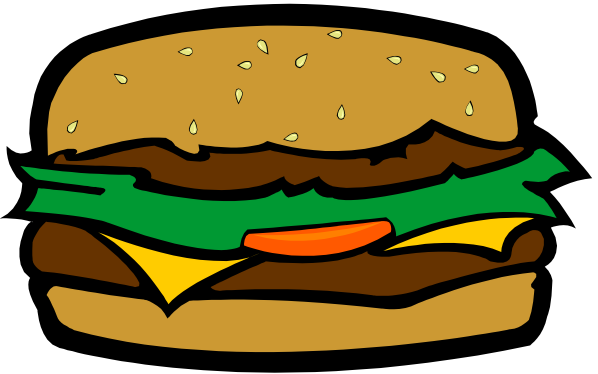
For example...      This shows that...      Consequently...      Furthermore...

Hence...      Therefore...      As a result...      Because of this...      Thus...

In addition...      Additionally...      This illustrates...      This indicates...

The basic formula is  $1CD = 2CM$ . That is, 1 Concrete Detail should come with 2 Commentary sentences.

Thus a two chunk paragraph (A double cheeseburger) would look like this:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>TS – Topic Sentence</b><br/> <b>CD – Concrete Detail</b><br/> <b>CM – Commentary</b><br/> <b>CM – Commentary</b><br/> <b>CD – Concrete Detail</b><br/> <b>CM – Commentary</b><br/> <b>CM – Commentary</b><br/> <b>CS – Closing Sentence</b></p> |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

It might read like this:

**TS – When Charlie is mentally retarded, he is at a disadvantage as a result of his limited mental capacity, yet he is trusting and unaware of the negativity around him.**

**CD – For example, Charlie knows that Joe Karp and Frank Reilly are ‘smart’ compared to himself, yet he thinks they are his friends and do not know they make jokes at his expense.**

**CM – This shows that even though Charlie realizes he is different than those around him, he is essentially happy and ignorant to the fact that he is being made fun of.**

**CM – Furthermore, Charlie is spared the pain of knowing the terrible realities of the world around him, such as mistreatment of the mentally handicapped.**

**CS – As a result, Charlie is happier before the operation even though he is lacking in intelligence and awareness of the world around him.**

Now you use that same system again for the second paragraph, only this time address the next argument or point you want to make. If there is a third body paragraph, use the system again for that paragraph. Remember, this is the formula:

**TS – Topic Sentence (The top bun)**

**CD – Concrete Detail (The Meat)**

**CM – Commentary (Lettuce & Tomato)**

**CM – Commentary (Cheese)**

**CD – Closing Sentence (Bottom Bun)**

**This is easy right? Now you try writing your first paragraph:**