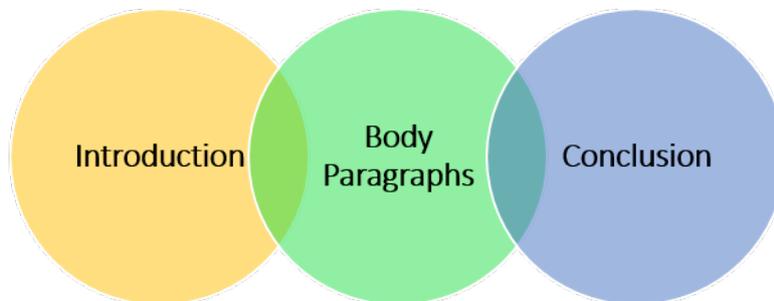


Elements of an Essay

Each essay assignment will differ, but all of your essays should include the following four basic elements¹. ***Always read your assignment sheet carefully for specific instructions and requirements.***



Introduction:

Here you set the context for your discussion and state your main argument. The introduction is your opportunity to raise your readers' curiosity about your topic.

- ✓ Some writers present information in the introduction from general-to-specific or known-to-new.
- ✓ Some writers try to cover the five "Ws": what, who, when, where, why.

Thesis:

Your introduction should end with a clear, specific thesis statement that tells readers exactly what your paper will be arguing. Each *body paragraph* will directly and obviously support your thesis.

- ✓ A strong thesis addresses a controversy, shows connections between ideas or perspectives, states your informed opinion, and provides specific conditions.
- ✓ Weak thesis²: The invention of the cell phone has brought many advantages to our culture.
- ✓ Stronger thesis: Although the cell phone has brought many advantages to our culture, it may also have contributed to an increase in risky behavior among boaters and hikers.

Body Paragraphs:

An essay usually has at least three body paragraphs that each present evidence to support your *thesis*.

- **Topic Sentences:** The first sentence of each paragraph should state the topic of that paragraph—that is, it should describe the content of that paragraph in broad terms. All of the information in that paragraph should be clearly and logically related to that *topic sentence*, which in turn should obviously relate to the *thesis*.
- **Evidence:** Some examples of evidence are data, statistics, quotes, images, examples, anecdotes, and other details.
- **Transitions:** An effective essay will show the connection between paragraphs with transitions. These can be the final sentence of each *body paragraph* or can be integrated into the next *topic sentence* with transition words. See TLC's other information sheets on "flow" and "transitions."

Conclusion:

A conclusion wraps up the argument by summarizing the evidence presented and goes a step further to suggest how the perspective or solution in the essay can be expanded or applied beyond the specific context given in the introduction.

¹ Information adapted from a prior TLC information sheet by Eleanor Wakefield, Writing Consultant.

² Ramage, J.D., Bean, J.C., and Johnson, J. (2012). *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, (6th ed., p. 39), Glenview, IL: Pearson Education, Inc.

Seeing Your Essay's Structure

How will you organize your thoughts about a topic as they grow and shift? It may help to visualize them so you can literally see how the pieces might fit together in a bigger picture.

In essays, arguments are almost always presented in a hierarchical relationship.³ The thesis statement is the highest level argument. Evidence, which may fall into categories that warrant their own paragraphs, is the next level. Details within each piece of evidence are the next level.

You can display—and discover—relationships among your arguments and pieces of evidence by creating different visual structures. Some common ones are shown below.

OUTLINE

| Paragraph Type | Paragraph Details |
|------------------|---|
| Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context • Thesis statement |
| Body Paragraph 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Evidence detail 1 • Evidence detail 2 • Transition sentence |
| Body Paragraph 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Evidence detail 1 • Evidence detail 2 • Transition sentence |
| Body Paragraph 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Evidence detail 1 • Evidence detail 2 • Transition sentence |
| Conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary • Application to other contexts |

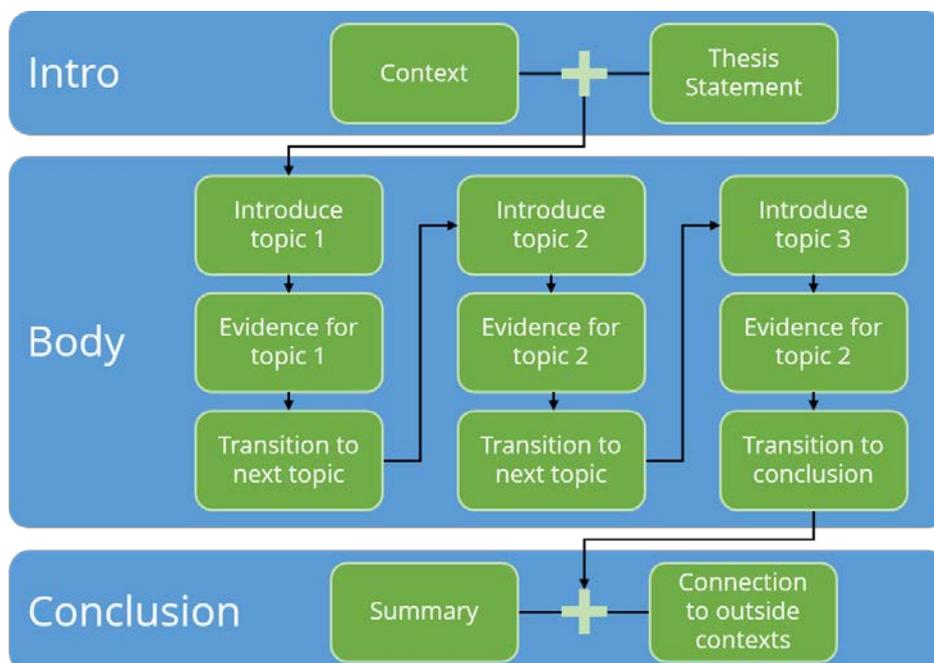
Add more levels of details by extending the hierarchy using numerals and letters, like this:

- 1) 1st level
 - a) 2nd level
 - i) 3rd level
 - (1) 4th level
 - (a) 5th level

Be sure that you revisit levels when you need to keep yourself organized.

Most sources say that every A must have a corresponding B. That is, the outline must have equal parts per section.

DIAGRAM



³ Ramage, J.D., Bean, J.C., and Johnson, J. (2012). *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, (6th ed., p. 459), Glenview, IL: Pearson Education, Inc.