

Breaking Down the Parts of an Essay



After reading your essay, your teacher should not feel like they're untangling a ball of cables to see which ones get plugged in where. Use the following explanations of each part of the essay and its purpose to help guide you through writing a well-organized assignment.

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

The introductory paragraph establishes the essay's **PURPOSE**. You can look at it as a road map to the rest of your essay: it identifies the destination (the thesis statement) and how you're planning on getting there (the three points).

General Hook Sentence(s)

- First sentence(s) of the introductory paragraph.
- **NOT** the same as the essay's thesis statement.
- Used to introduce the reader to the topic with which the essay will be dealing.
- **DO NOT** include information which relates to the specific text(s) upon which the essay focuses (e.g. names, title of text, etc.).
- If you use a quotation, make sure you cite the source from which it comes.

Titles and Authors' Names

- Simply used to introduce the text(s) with which the essay's contents are focused.
- Always present material for each in the same order to maintain structure and order.
- Helps the reader remain focused and organized.

Three Points

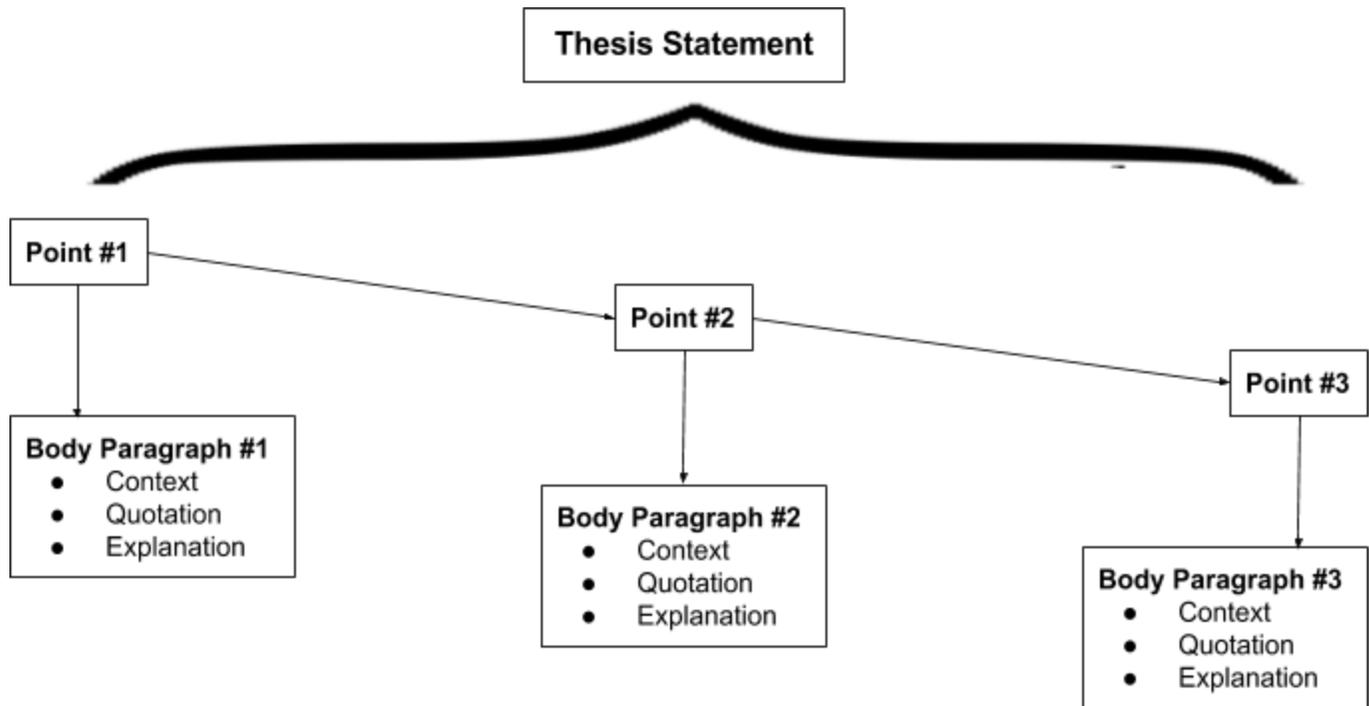
- The points are used to present how you're going to develop your essay argument.
- The strongest way to present your three points is to state each one in its own sentence.
- Each point should only be one sentence in length, and it should be short and simple.
- Points in a single text literary essay may be specific to the text itself, but points for a comparative essay must be general enough to apply to both texts being compared.
- Use transitions to organize your work and present the relationships between the points.
- Make sure you select your method of development (e.g. Progressive vs. "Three Reasons") carefully, as this decision will often dramatically affect your essay's level or success!

Thesis Statement

- A brief, one sentence statement identifying what you're proving in the essay. This one sentence is your essay's "goal." Without a thesis statement, you've got nowhere to go!
- A thesis in a single text literary essay may be specific to the text itself, but one for a comparative essay must be general enough to apply to both texts being compared.
- If your essay is intended to focus on supporting a theme within a text, the theme itself will likely be your thesis statement.
- Make sure your thesis addresses the topic/question intended; **DO NOT** develop your own thesis instead of using one of the ones listed on a test.

BODY PARAGRAPHS

The body paragraphs are where you develop your argument through presentation of quotations to support your point and logical explanations which allow the reader to see the connections between your evidence and the points you're using to prove your thesis statement.



Topic Sentence

- The first sentence of each body paragraph is intended to remind the reader what they will be reading about in the paragraph itself.
- Only one sentence in length.
- Each body paragraph's topic sentence should mirror the corresponding point. For example, the topic sentence for body paragraph #1 should state point #1, the body paragraph for body paragraph #2 should state point #2, etc.

Context

- A quotation's context is intended to tell the reader what they need to know in order to understand the situation in which the quotation arises within the text.
- Remember that, particularly in a Progressive or Divergent Style essay, the context within the first body paragraph should be longer, because the writer needs to establish background plot details, such as characters, conflicts, important setting details, etc.
- Make sure that the context is not a plot summary filled with unnecessary details. Only include information that the reader needs to understand in order to have a clear, linear understanding of the required plot details.
- Make sure your context is specific and leads smoothly into the quotation it precedes. Make sure that there are no questions in the reader's mind regarding gaps in the plot.
- Always assume that the reader is not familiar with the text being presented within your essay.

Quotation

- The quotation needs to support the point presented in the topic sentence.
- Always use the same number of quotations per text per body paragraph.
- Make sure that proper quotation marks are used to identify your quotation.
- Make sure that the quotation is properly cited according to MLA format guidelines.

Explanation

- This component's purpose is to explain **HOW** the quotation supports the point in question.
- Whereas the context consists of plot details from the text, the explanation is the writer's analysis of the quotation in question.
- Explanation is **NOT** more context from the text **OR** a translation of what is stated in the quotation itself. It's where the writer presents their logic and makes the connection between the quotation in question and the point it is supporting.
- Pretend that you are trying to persuade a reader who does not believe the point you're trying to prove. Essentially, you're "holding the reader's hand" as you lead them through an explanation of your logical train of thought.
- After reading a good explanation, the reader should have no questions as to how your quotation supports your point.

Concluding Sentence

- A one sentence restatement of your topic sentence.
- Used to remind the reader about the topic of the previous body paragraph.
- If the essay is a "Three Reasons" type of essay, this sentence should connect the point proven within the paragraph to the thesis statement.

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

The purpose of this paragraph is strictly as a reminder about what was just proven in the essay. **DO NOT** include any new information or analysis.

Restatement of Thesis Statement

- A one sentence restatement of the thesis.

Restatement of Three Points

- Either state the three supports together in one sentence or each in their own separate sentence.
- Use transitions to organize these three supports and present the relationship between them.

General Concluding Sentence

- A brief statement (could be between 1 and 3 sentences) to wrap up the essay and bring it to a conclusion.
- Should be a statement regarding the essay's general topic, and usually mirrors or responds to the general hook sentence.
- Leaves the reader with something to consider at the end of the essay.