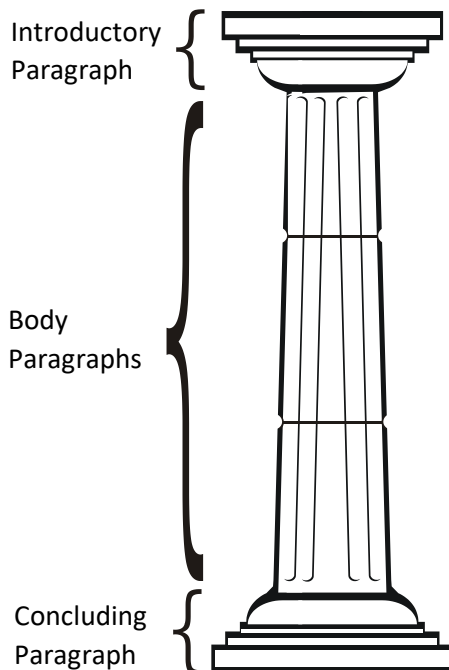


# The Basic Essay

Instructors use the term “essay” to refer to a wide range of written work. Usually, they mean a piece of writing that has several paragraphs and has one focus or idea. This resource discusses a basic essay format and the three main parts: the introductory, body and concluding paragraphs.

## A Visual Overview of the Basic Essay

One way to think of an essay is to think of a pillar on an old Greek or Roman temple. Picturing this image can help you remember some key issues about essay structure.



At the top, there is a wide part that narrows to the width of the pillar. This top part is like the introduction. It is broader than the content of the rest of the essay, but it narrows to a focused thesis at the end of the introduction.

The body of the essay is represented by the column itself. The body stays within the confines of the focus of the thesis. The body of the essay is made up of building blocks which hold up the thesis. Each block is heavy and strong. The strength of a body paragraph comes from the strength of the evidence and explanation provided.

At the bottom, there is another part that widens out from the column to make a pedestal on the floor. In the same way, the conclusion begins with the narrower focus of the body paragraphs and thesis and then widens out to include other ideas. Notice how this pedestal is a mirror-image of the top of the pillar. Similarly, a conclusion is like a mirror-image of an introduction.

## The Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph should be brief, typically no more than about 6 sentences in a short essay.

The introduction’s role is to:

- To motivate your reader to read further
- To provide a context for your essay, and
- To clarify the purpose and scope of your essay.

**The Thesis:** The most important part of the introduction is the thesis statement. It generally comes at the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis statement typically expresses a point of view (or argument) about a topic. The purpose of the essay is to prove the truth of the thesis statement. Here are two examples of thesis statements:

- *In “The Necklace,” de Maupassant shows that personal tragedy can lead to strength of character.*
- *Although the raid at Dieppe was unsuccessful, it was necessary to boost the morale of the citizens of Allied countries.*

Notice how each of these examples introduces a topic and then focuses on a particular aspect of that topic.

In some types of essays, a thesis statement expressing a point of view is not needed. In those essays, the thesis statement simply clarifies what the essay is about. Consult our assignment instructions or instructor to clarify what type of thesis statement you need.

**Developing the Introduction:** Once you have written a thesis statement, you can develop your introduction in a number of ways. One way to develop your introduction is to start with a statement relating to one key concept in your thesis. This statement should be interesting enough to encourage your reader to read on. Then in subsequent sentences, narrow your focus to something more specific and closer to your thesis statement. The introduction ends with the thesis statement, the most specific sentence in the introduction.

## The Body Paragraphs

The body of an essay is made up of several sections. In a short essay, a section is the same as a paragraph. In a longer essay, each section may be broken up into a few paragraphs. The number of body paragraphs depends on what the writer has to say and the length of the essay required.

An essay has more than one body paragraph. Each body paragraph has the following components:

**Topic Sentence:** The specific point to be developed in a paragraph is stated in its topic sentence, usually at the beginning of the paragraph. Typically, key words or concepts from the thesis statement should be reflected in the topic sentences. This helps the flow of the essay by clearly connecting each section back to the main point of the essay as stated in the thesis in the introduction.

**Support (Evidence and Explanation):** After the topic sentence, you need to provide support for the point you are making. Often this will involve several supporting points. Each supporting point needs 2 parts: 1) evidence, and 2) explanation. The evidence might include facts, statistics, quotes, anecdotes, logical arguments, examples, elaboration, description or definition. The second part of giving support – explanation – is crucial because the reader needs to be told how the evidence supports the point that the writer is making. The purpose of the evidence and explanation is to prove the truth of the topic sentence.

**Unity:** Each body paragraph needs to be unified. This means that each sentence in the paragraph must clearly relate to the topic sentence of that paragraph.

**Coherence:** Each body paragraph needs to be coherent. This means that each sentence is logically connected to the sentence before it. This smooth flow of ideas can be created using transitions, repetition of key words and ideas, and presentation of ideas in a logical order.

## The Concluding Paragraph

The concluding paragraph generally includes:

- A brief summary of the main points of the essay and/or a restatement of the thesis statement
- A final comment on the topic. This might be a discussion of the implications of the truth of your thesis (answering the question, *so what?*) or some discussion providing food for thought for your reader concerning the thesis or a related topic.