

BODY PARAGRAPHS

Most essays include three components: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Typically, the body develops the main idea of the paper in a series of paragraphs. Effective body paragraphs support your thesis, organize your material, and help the reader understand your argument. Each paragraph develops a point, reason, or example that supports your thesis.

There is no one formula for putting a body paragraph together. Much will depend on what kind of paper you are writing. Here are some elements that many body paragraphs include:

- A topic sentence
- Evidence
- Analysis
- A transition sentence (when needed)

TOPIC SENTENCES

Most body paragraphs are limited to a single topic. If you state the topic of the paragraph early and if you make your claim for that topic clear, then your reader will have a better chance of understanding what you have to say. This is why, unless you are writing in a very specific genre that does not call for it, starting a body paragraph with a topic sentence is often an effective strategy.

What does a topic sentence do?

- As an absolute minimum, it **mentions the topic** of the paragraph.
- Ideally, it also **makes a claim about the topic** that will be demonstrated by the paragraph (so it is like a mini-thesis for just that paragraph).
- A topic sentence **may also relate the claim** made by the topic sentence back to the larger claim made by the thesis. This can help the reader see how everything in your paper relates back to your larger argument.

EVIDENCE

Any details, facts, quotes, or examples that support and illustrate your claim can serve as evidence. The type of evidence you use will vary depending on your assignment. In a personal essay, for example, an anecdote could be effective evidence, but in an analysis of population trends, you will probably need to include statistics.

Introduce your evidence by providing some background information or context. This could be an entire sentence, or just a phrase. See our handout *Using Sources* for phrases to introduce quotations or evidence.

Quotation: Quotes are a very common type of evidence in an academic paper. Depending on what type of assignment you are doing, you may use quotes frequently (as in an analysis of a poem or play) or not at all (as in a lab report). See our handout *Choosing and Using Quotations* for more ideas about how to pick, integrate, and punctuate quotations.

ANALYSIS

Although it may be obvious to you, as the writer, how your evidence relates to your claim, it probably won't be obvious to your reader. You therefore almost always need some analysis to give reasons for accepting your evidence, to suggest its significance, or to show how the evidence relates back to your claims.

TRANSITIONS (WHEN NEEDED)

If your paragraph contains sub-topics, you may need to put transitions between them to show when you shift sub-topics and how they relate to each other. You might also put one just before your topic sentence or at the end of the paragraph to help the reader understand how the ideas in different paragraphs progress, relate, or work together to support your position.

One common template for organizing a body paragraph uses the acronym **TIQA**

T- TOPIC

I-INTRODUCTION

Q-QUOTATION

A-ANALYSIS

This is an example from a paper in which the student has been asked to demonstrate the use of irony in Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," and to use the text of the poem itself to support his or her claims.

Topic Sentence In "Mending Wall," one irony resides in the fact that, although the speaker has ambiguous feelings about the wall, he actively participates in maintaining it.

Introduction At the beginning, the speaker says,

Quotation "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

Analysis He uses the line again later in the poem, after expressing a number of doubts about walls; clearly, he does not love them himself.

Transition However, it is also true that the speaker is the one who initiates the wall building,

Introduction saying, when it is time to mend the wall,

Quotation "I let my neighbor know beyond the hill."

Analysis This discordance, the fact that the speaker is the one to start the wall-mending even though he dislikes it, is what makes the speaker's situation ironic.

And so on...

What will you include in your body paragraph?

Topic Sentence	
Introduction	
Quotation or other Evidence	
Analysis	
Transition	
Introduction	
Quotation or other Evidence	
Analysis	