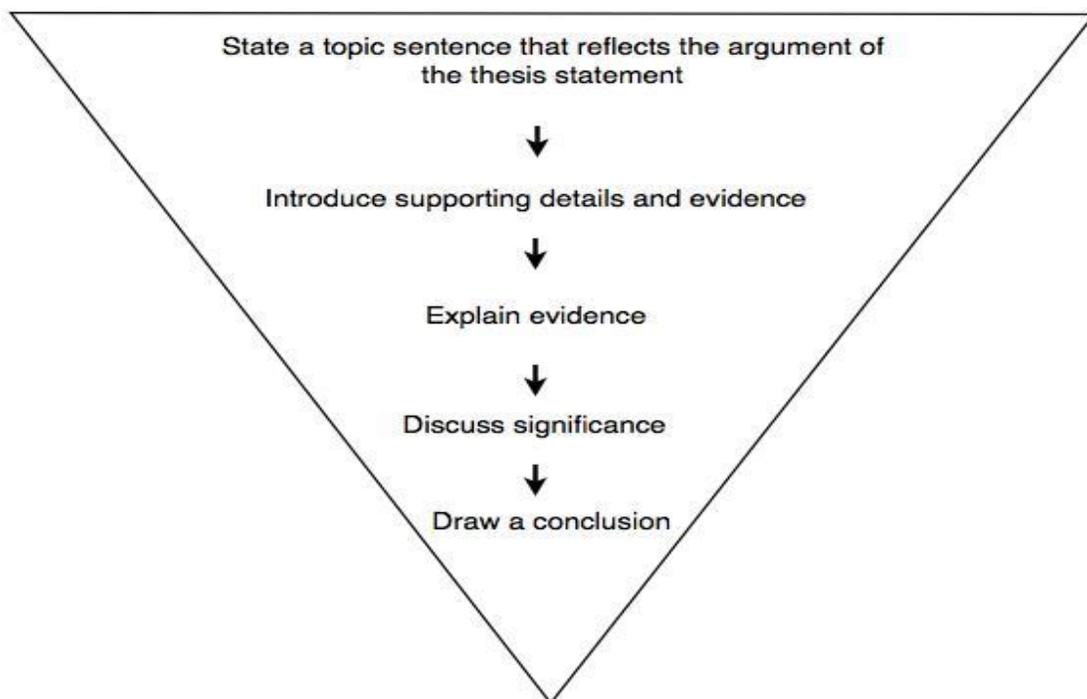


Developing Body Paragraphs

Within an essay, body paragraphs allow a writer to expand on ideas and provide audiences with support for a chosen topic or argument. Under most circumstances, body paragraphs can be divided into three basic parts: a topic sentence, an illustration, and an explanation. These three parts answer three questions for the reader: What's your point? Can you give an example? How does your example establish your point? If you answer these three questions, you will have also established a conclusion with which to end the paragraph. To write an effective body paragraph, follow these steps:

- begin with a clear topic sentence that logically supports the thesis statement.
- support the argument by providing facts, examples, quotations, or statistics that develop or support the central claim of the paragraph.
- explain the significance of each fact, example, quote, or statistic.
- draw a clear conclusion that is relevant to the thesis statement.

Because it develops evidence to support a claim, an effective body paragraph moves from general to specific information. The most general information should be at the beginning of the paragraph, and, as the paragraph moves forward, the paragraph should become more focused as it provides specific information to reach a clear and specific conclusion. You can visualize a body paragraph as an inverted triangle.



Parts of a Body Paragraph

The different parts of a body paragraph combine to generate clear and logical ideas for the reader. It is important to be comfortable with how to use these parts to create a readable, usable paragraph.

Topic Sentence

In academic essays, topic sentences usually appear at the beginning of a body paragraph. Because a topic sentence encapsulates the idea of your body paragraph, it introduces to your audience what the paragraph will be about. It should reflect or advance the argument of your thesis statement.

Supporting Details

Following the topic sentence are sentences that introduce your supporting evidence. Evidence may include a useful or informative sentence from a book, a journal article, or another source that supports the argument of the paper. It may also include an example drawn from first-hand observation or personal experience.

Explanation

Clarify the information you provided with your quote or example. Explain what the quote means in a concise manner. Provide necessary details to develop your example as evidence.

Significance

Discuss the significance of the quote/example to the argument of the paper.

Conclusion/Transition

As the discussion of evidence draws to a close, you should draw on the evidence and explanation to reach a conclusion: a new understanding of the thesis. This conclusion may set up the transition to the next paragraph.

Sample Body Paragraph

Below is an example of a well-constructed body paragraph that uses all of the parts of a body paragraph mentioned above to demonstrate the thematic significance of a beloved character. These parts are labeled. Notice how all the parts combine to express the author's point effectively.

[Topic Sentence] In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, J.K. Rowling suggests through her portrayal of Hagrid that appearance can be misleading. **[Supporting Details]** Although he is one of the most loved characters in the Harry Potter universe, his initial confrontation with Harry strikes intimidation in the young boy's heart. The narrator notes that Hagrid's face is "almost

completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard,” and his eyes, “glint[ing] like black beetles,” peer down at Harry (Rowling 46). **[Explanation]** Harry’s anxiety seeps through the page as he is confronted by an intimidating figure, and because this description paints such a scary picture, the reader might expect Hagrid to be a rather frightening person as the book progresses. **[Significance]** This initial description, however, is contrasted by Hagrid’s true character. Besides serving as a trusted informant to Dumbledore and a crucial ally to Harry and his friends, Hagrid displays an immense compassion for animals, an affection so powerful it sometimes reduces the giant to tears. **[Conclusion/Transition]** Hagrid’s humble actions and earnest compassion show that appearances can be misleading, a theme that many characters mirror in the book.

Activity: What Doesn’t Fit?

Review the following body paragraph. 1) Eliminate any sentences that do not relate to the topic sentence and main idea of the body paragraph. 2) Identify each of the five elements of a body paragraph defined above. This exercise will strengthen your ability to stay focused when you write your next paper.

One of the most important aspects of ice hockey is speed because players must skate around defensemen and get to open areas of the rink. The fastest players are able to sneak around an opposing defense and go on breakaways, creating scoring chances. Being big is also important because size allows players to hit hard. One of the fastest players in the NHL is Teemu Selanne of the Anaheim Ducks. Because of his iconic speed and Finish heritage, Teemu is known as the “Finnish Flash.” He has used his speed to score more than 600 goals during his career. He can usually be seen streaking down the boards, flying by helpless defensemen, and crashing the net to score goals. “Teemu Selanne’s impressive career resulted in 10 All Star Game appearances.” Ultimately, such speed is what makes a player extraordinary, even though it is just one of many attributes an ice hockey player must have to succeed.

Answer Key for Activity

1) The following two sentences do not relate to the topic sentence and main idea of the body paragraph: “Being big is also important because size allows players to hit hard,” and “Teemu Selanne’s impressive career resulted in 10 All Star Game appearances.”

2) Identification of body paragraph elements:

Topic Sentence: One of the most important aspects of ice hockey is speed because players must skate around defensemen and get to open areas of the rink.

Supporting Details: The fastest players are able to sneak around an opposing defense and go on

breakaways, creating scoring chances. One of the fastest players in the NHL is Teemu Selanne of the Anaheim Ducks.

Explanation: Because of his iconic speed and Finish heritage, Teemu is known as the “Finnish Flash.” He has used his speed to score more than 600 goals during his career.

Significance: He can usually be seen streaking down the boards, flying by helpless defensemen, and crashing the net to score goals.

Conclusion/Transition: Ultimately, speed is what makes a player extraordinary, even though it is just one of many attributes an ice hockey player must have to succeed.