

The Formal Essay

Although you will learn about many types of essays and styles of writings as you write in your college classes, it is important to know what is meant by the traditional or formal essay. Readers have particular expectations when they read an essay. To meet the expectations, writers begin by learning the structure of the traditional essay.

Simply put, an essay is a series of paragraphs written on one theme. Traditionally, the main idea for the essay is founded in the first paragraph, which is called the introduction. The main idea for an essay is called the thesis statement. The supporting points and details of the essay are found in the body paragraphs that follow the introduction.

Each of the developmental or body paragraphs contains a topic sentence that tells the main idea for the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph is made up of ideas or details that tell more about the main idea. These paragraphs may have different purposes, depending on the topic of the essay. A particular paragraph may describe, define, tell a relevant story, provide evidence to argue a point, compare and contrast, or analyze an issue. A writer often begins a new paragraph with a transition that connects the paragraph to the one that preceded it in order to help the reader follow the writer's train of thought.

The traditional essay ends with a concluding paragraph. In the paragraph, the writer ties together the important points that have been made in the essay. The conclusion lets the reader know that the writer has thought the topic through and believes that the ideas presented in the essay are complete.

Conclusions are usually short and may include a brief summary of the main points of the essay. Most writers agree that new ideas should not be presented in the conclusion, although a related story or idea might pull the theme of the essay together effectively.

Keep this standard structure in mind when you write your next essay.

Smoke, T. (1996). A Writer's Workbook. New York: St. Martin's Press. (APA style)

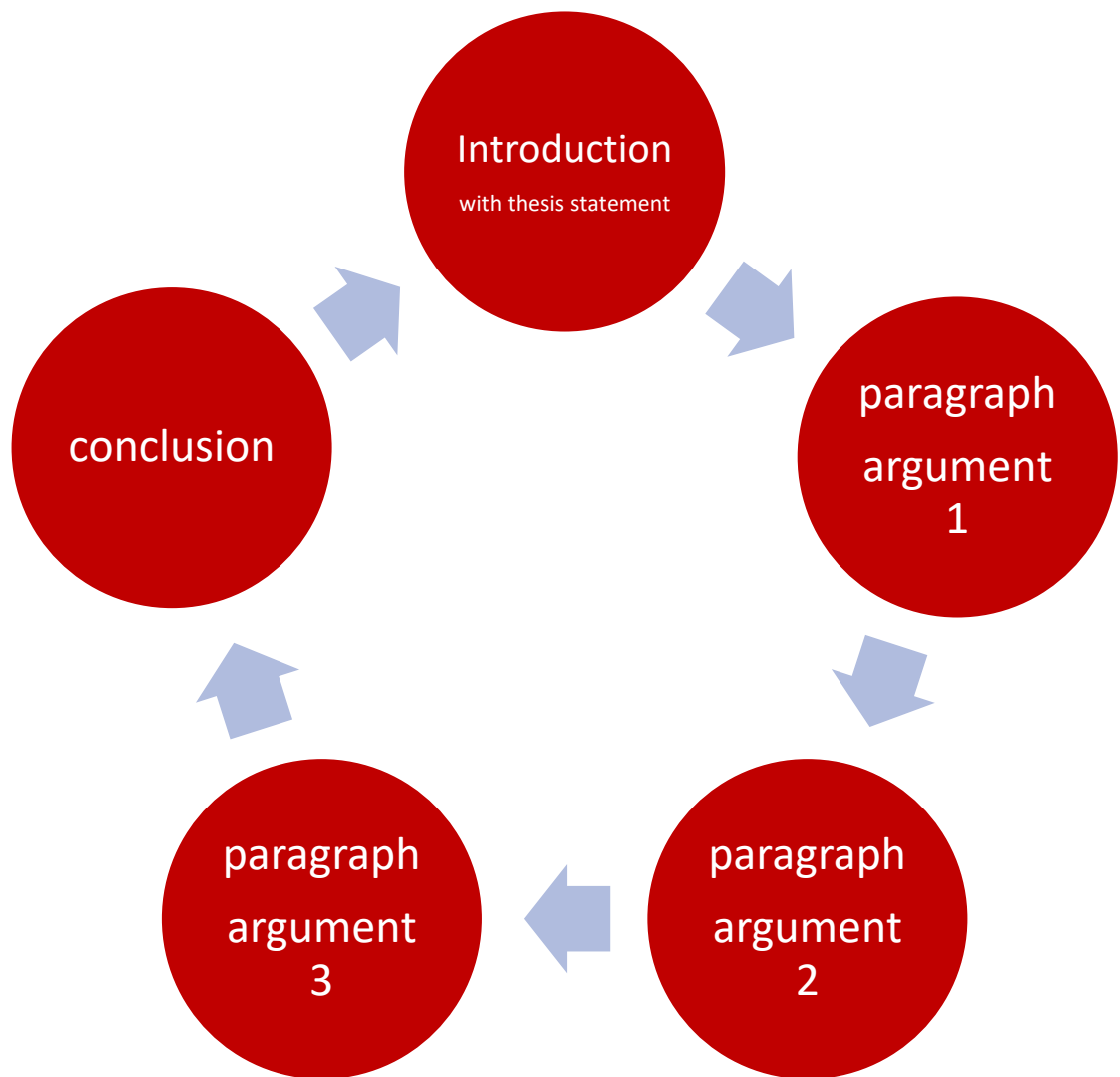
Directions

1. Circle the following words in the paragraphs above:

introduction main idea thesis statement body paragraphs
topic sentence conclusion

2. Answer the following questions on the basis of the information in the paragraphs above.

- a) What is the first paragraph of an essay called?
- b) What is the main idea for the whole essay called?
- c) What do the body paragraphs contain?
- d) What is the main idea for each body paragraph called?
- e) What is the final paragraph in the essay called?
- f) What is the purpose of the final paragraph?



1. The diagram above represents an essay? Why do you think it is in a circle?
2. How many arguments are in each paragraph?

Basic Format

Follow the format below when writing the final version of your essay. Is this different to the format used in Germany?

This is the header. It includes:
student name, instructor's name, course and date.

Notice it is double-spaced

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Englischvertiefung BM12

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Don't forget the title. It should be centered and in **bold**.

Title

The theory of cognitive development, created by psychologist Jean Piaget, is a theory that helps us understand how human intelligence develops. Piaget interviewed and observed children during his experiments and created four stage of cognitive development the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational period. Bla bla bla blab la bla bla bla bla . . .

Make it obvious that a new paragraph has started by clicking the return key twice.

Bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla
bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla bla
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The essay should be doubled-spaced and in block format – no indentation.

Use times New Roman font, size 12

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is the sentence in the first paragraph that guides the writer and reader through the essay. The body of the essay supports the thesis statement with arguments or evidence for the thesis.

The thesis statement should clearly identify an argument. It needs to be a statement that is not only easy to understand, but one that is debatable. A simple statement of fact is a weak thesis statement such as, "In the Northern Hemisphere, the summer months are warmer than the winter months." This isn't really something that's a debatable topic.

Additionally, the thesis statement shouldn't be too big or too grand. It'll be hard to cover everything in a thesis statement like:

The federal government should act now on climate change.

The topic is just too large to actually say something new and meaningful. Instead, a more effective thesis statement might be:

Local governments can combat climate change by providing citizens with larger recycling bins and offering local classes about composting and conservation.

This is easier to work with because it's a smaller idea, yet the overall topic which you are interested in, climate change, can be discussed.

Keep in mind that the thesis statement gives the writer's opinion or states an important idea about the topic. It should give an idea that can be discussed and explained with supporting ideas.

Consider the following thesis statements

1. When studying a foreign language, there are several ways to improve your use of the language.
This thesis statement can be discussed or explained although it is weak. It would be better to include the main ways to improve language use. This way the reader will know what to expect.
2. In the Northern Hemisphere, the summer months are warmer than the winter months.
This is not a strong thesis statement. It cannot be discussed or argued about.
3. There are advantages and disadvantages to using nuclear power.
This is not a thesis statement. It gives two sides of an argument without giving a clear opinion of support or disagreement.

Better: Although there are some advantages, using nuclear power has many disadvantages and therefore, should not be a part of our country's energy plan.

This is a strong thesis statement because it clearly gives the writer's opinion about nuclear power.

Exercise 1 – Thesis Statement

Directions: Tick the sentences that would make good statements.

1. ☐ School uniforms may be an upfront cost for families, but they still have many advantages.
2. ☐ The rise in populism on the 2016 political stage was in reaction to increasing globalization, the decline of manufacturing jobs, and the Syrian refugee crisis.
3. ☐ With more and more teens using smartphones and social media, cyber bullying is on the rise.
4. ☐ With more and more teens using smartphones and social media, cyber bullying is on the rise. Cyber bullying puts a lot of stress on many teens, and can cause depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.
5. ☐ Studies have shown that the use of medicinal marijuana has been helpful to veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Medicinal marijuana prescriptions should be legal in all states and provided to these veterans. Additional medical or therapy services should also be researched and implemented in order to help them re-integrate back into civilian life.
6. ☐ Studying abroad is one of the most culturally valuable experiences you can have in college. It is the only way to get completely immersed in another language and learn how other cultures and countries are different from your own.