

UNIT 1

Writing an Expository Essay

- Part 1 Essay structure and the introductory paragraph
- Part 2 Body paragraphs, concluding paragraphs, and outlining
- Part 3 Improving your work

Part
1

Essay structure and the introductory paragraph

Section 1

Essay structure

An essay is a piece of writing made up of a number of paragraphs. Each paragraph has a specific role in an essay. In a five-paragraph essay, the first paragraph is an introduction; the second, third, and fourth paragraphs form the body of the essay; and the fifth paragraph is a conclusion (see diagram on page 4). This book will focus exclusively on the five-paragraph essay. Although essays may vary in length, the five-paragraph essay structure can be adapted for longer or shorter essays.

1. Introductory paragraph

The first paragraph of an essay should introduce the reader to the essay topic. It should create interest in the essay, outline the writer’s main ideas, and suggest how these ideas will be presented within the body of the essay. The introduction consists of three main elements: a **hook**, **building sentences**, and a **thesis statement**.

1. Hook

The first sentence (or sentences) of an essay should catch the reader’s attention. It introduces the topic of the essay in an interesting way.

2. Building sentences

After the hook, the following sentences should provide background information to give readers some context about the topic. They should “build” towards the thesis statement.

3. Thesis statement

The thesis statement comes at the end of the introduction. It is the most important sentence in the entire essay because it presents the essay topic and the writer’s position on that topic. It also indicates the main ideas that will be discussed in the body paragraphs.

2. Body paragraphs

The body of an essay consists of three paragraphs. Each body paragraph explains in detail one of the main ideas expressed in the thesis statement. There are three parts to a body paragraph: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

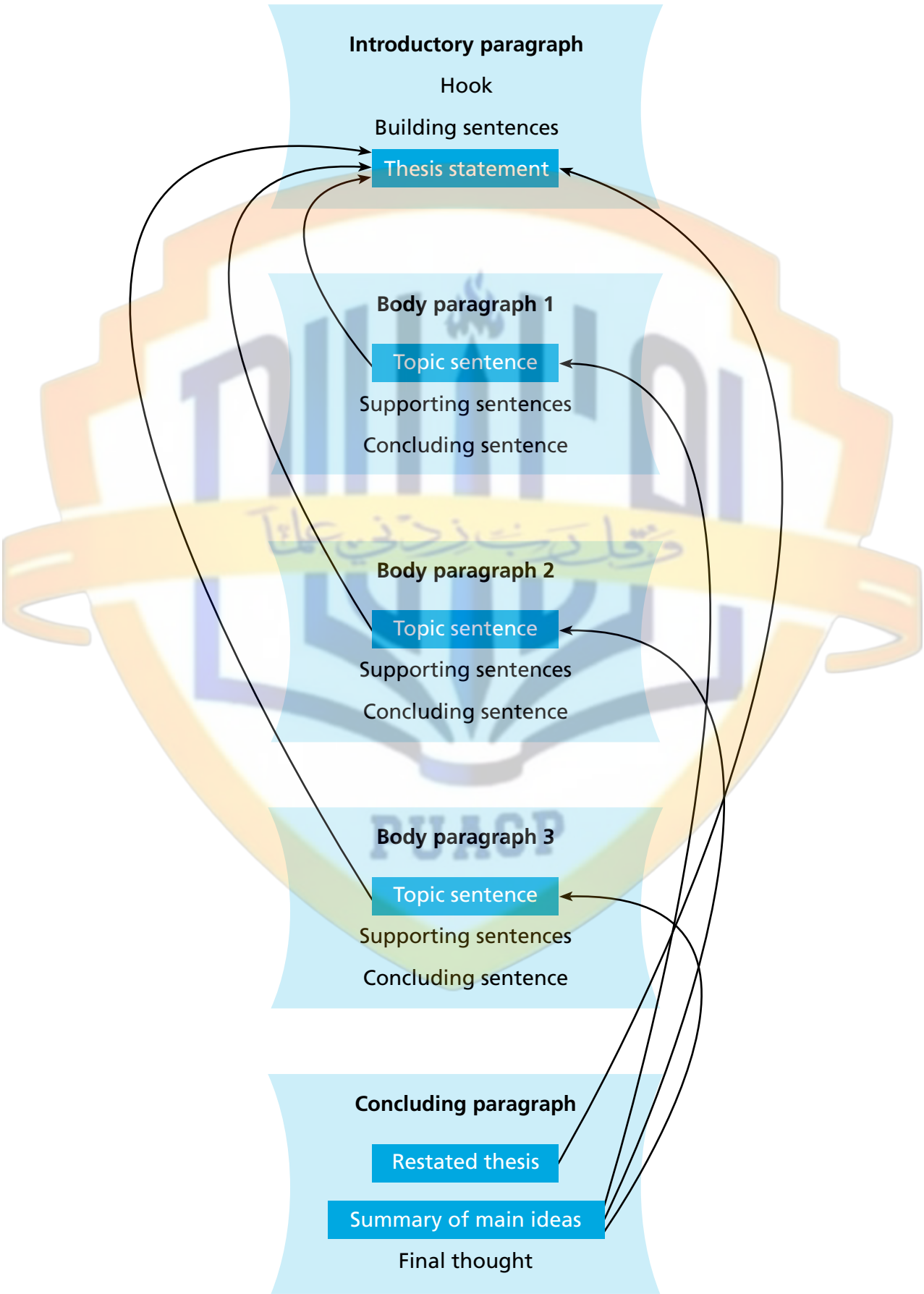
- 1. Topic sentence
The first sentence of a body paragraph expresses the topic of the paragraph and provides a controlling idea about the topic. All information in the paragraph supports the controlling idea.
- 2. Supporting sentences
Supporting sentences explain and develop the topic sentence. They present logical thoughts, evidence, and explanations in support of the controlling idea.
- 3. Concluding sentence
The paragraph may end with a concluding thought on the paragraph topic. It may also show a transition to the next paragraph.

3. Concluding paragraph

The concluding paragraph ends the essay by reviewing the main ideas from each body paragraph and leaving the reader with a final thought. The conclusion consists of three elements: a restated thesis, a summary of main ideas, and a final thought.

- 1. Restated thesis
At the start of the conclusion, the thesis is restated in words different from those in the introduction.
- 2. Summary of main ideas
The main ideas from each of the body paragraphs are summarized as a reminder to the reader.
- 3. Final thought
The writer ends the essay by presenting a final thought on the topic – for example, by stating an opinion, a solution, or a prediction. The final thought should leave a strong impression and encourage the reader to think further about the topic.

Five-paragraph essay structure



Exercise 1

The model essay below answers the following essay question:
Explain how an alternate form of energy is being used successfully in the world today.

Identify these elements in the following model essay.

- 1. Introduction, body, and conclusion.
- 2. The three main parts of the introduction.
- 3. The three main parts of each body paragraph.
- 4. The three main parts of the conclusion.

“I’d put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don’t have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.” With this statement, Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, recognized the capacity of the sun as a virtually limitless source of energy in 1931. However, although a time when oil and coal have been completely used up could be getting closer, the full potential of solar power is yet to be harnessed by mankind. Televisions, refrigerators, air conditioners, and all the other appliances common in the developed world require vast amounts of electricity, meaning that the world’s most powerful countries still very much depend on fossil fuels. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of South America, however, solar power is already changing the lives of people who have until now lived without a steady electricity supply. As low-cost solar panels become available, they are being used most effectively in some of the world’s poorest countries, which also happen to be some of the sunniest. Solar power is improving people’s lives in developing countries by providing efficient light safely, linking them to the global mobile community and increasing their independence.

Low-cost, solar-powered lamps provide a dependable and safe source of light to people in rural communities who often have no connection to a national electricity grid. People either had to do without electricity, or were limited to using unreliable, low-intensity light from candles or kerosene lamps at night. Now, a new solar-powered lamp, when charged for eight hours in the bright sun, can provide up to a hundred hours of continuous, stable light (“Solar”). As a result, families are now able to extend and enrich their days by pursuing hobbies or crafts, and socializing longer into the evening with a brighter, constant light. Furthermore, solar power is clean and safe. An Energy Resource Group article reports, “Health problems caused by toxic fumes from kerosene lamps are responsible for an estimated two million deaths annually” (Silver). In addition, both candles and kerosene are a fire hazard, especially in homes that tend to be predominantly made of wood. Solar-powered lighting removes these dangers from people’s homes because they emit no fumes and have no open flame, so people benefit from cleaner air and a reduced worry of fire. Solar power, therefore, has not only changed people’s lives, it has also made their lives safer.

As well as providing reliable and safe light, the power of these solar panels is also being used to help people in developing countries connect to global communication networks. The same solar panel that provides light at night can be used to charge and recharge a cellular phone, which brings a number of significant benefits. For example, *New York Times* writer Sharon LaFraniere found that in rural, often remote parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, cell phones allow people to communicate easily and immediately with neighboring villages, as well as provide access to banking networks and global information sources (C3). The same article also reported that in a study of rural communities in developing countries, shop owners, traders, farmers, and fishermen all claimed that access to a cell phone had a positive impact on their profits (LaFraniere C3). As a result, their communities benefited economically. By providing a link to the world beyond the old limits of their immediate community, solar power is giving people in developing nations the means to improve their livelihoods.

Last, as a consequence of the technological benefits brought by solar power, people in developing countries are able to live their lives with greater autonomy. Solar power allows a poor family to make considerable financial savings. A BBC news story explains that a solar-powered lamp is relatively expensive for most families in developing countries, but because it costs nothing to operate after the purchase, it is much cheaper than alternatives, like kerosene ("Solar"). With their savings, more families can invest money into developing or expanding their farms or small businesses, which leads to greater financial stability and independence. Furthermore, solar power provides an environment in which people can educate themselves. In the journal *Africa Renewal* – *United Nations Department of Public Information*, it was concluded that literacy rates and the number of people studying for trade certificates are increasing faster in towns and villages where solar-powered lamps are accessible (Madamombe 10). Therefore, by allowing both children and adults to study at home in the evenings, solar power provides an opportunity for many people in the poorest parts of the world to escape a life of dependency through better education.

In summary, solar power is making a significant difference to the lives of people in the developing world. By providing safe, clean, and efficient light, it is removing dangers from people's homes while brightening their evenings. In addition, the ability to charge a cell phone allows people to communicate with the world and grow their businesses. The increased time and money available give people the means to take control of their lives and build for the future. The evidence certainly shows that in parts of the world where there is abundant sunlight, harnessing solar energy can be a key to improving the lives of many people.

Section 2

The introductory paragraph

The introductory paragraph should inform the reader of the essay's:

- topic.
- purpose.
- main ideas to be presented in the body paragraphs.

An effective introductory paragraph also creates interest in the topic and provides the reader with a strong reason to continue reading. It consists of three elements:

- a hook.
- building sentences.
- a thesis statement.

1. Writing a thesis statement

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in the essay because it specifically states what the essay will be about. In other words, it states the purpose of the essay. Therefore, a thesis statement should include:

- the topic of the essay.
- the writer's position, opinion, or approach to the topic.
- the main ideas that will develop and support the writer's position.

Also note the following about the thesis statement:

- It appears at the end of the introductory paragraph and, in short essays, is usually one sentence long.
- The main ideas are listed in the same order as they appear in the essay, which gives the reader a clear preview of what the following paragraphs will be about.

Example of a thesis statement:

Solar power is improving people's lives in developing countries by providing efficient light safely, linking them to the global mobile community, and increasing their independence.

This thesis statement shows that:

- "solar power" is the topic of the essay.
- the writer's position on this topic is that it is "improving people's lives in developing countries."
- the three main ideas that support the writer's position are a) it is "providing efficient light safely," b) it is "linking them to the global mobile community," and c) it is "increasing their independence." Each main idea will be explained in detail in a separate body paragraph: a) in the first body paragraph, b) in the second, and c) in the third.

It is useful to think of the thesis statement as the writer’s answer to an essay question. Compare the essay question and thesis statement for the essay on page 5. The thesis statement provides a basic answer to the question, and the remainder of the essay will support this answer in greater detail.

Question:

Explain how an alternate form of energy is being used successfully in the world today.

Thesis statement:

Solar power is improving people’s lives in developing countries by providing efficient light safely, linking them to the global mobile community, and increasing their independence.

Exercise 2

Read the following thesis statements. Where possible, underline the topic of the essay; the writer’s position, opinion, or approach; and the three main ideas. Decide (✓ or ✗) whether each thesis statement has these parts or not.

- 1. (____) South Korean dramas are popular because of the traditional values in these shows, the focus on romantic love, and the kindness of the male characters.
- 2. (____) This is because smartphones allow us to connect to the internet, provide a range of useful and entertaining applications, and combine the functions of several electronic devices.
- 3. (____) The internet has caused interest in daily newspapers to fall and may cause some newspapers to close.
- 4. (____) Popular music changed dramatically in the 1990s for a number of reasons.
- 5. (____) Rather than simply formulaic superhero stories, contemporary American comics cover a wide range of interests and themes, such as history, social problems, and human relationships.

2. Writing a “hook”

The hook is the first sentence of the essay, so it should create interest in the topic of the essay and encourage the reader to continue reading.

Use one of the following strategies to “hook” the reader.

- 1. **An eye-catching statement** uses an interesting idea or an idea opposing the thesis to introduce the topic.
- 2. **A surprising statistic** uses a detail that is not widely known to introduce the topic.
- 3. **A quotation (by an expert on the topic)** is a powerfully worded statement that begins the essay in a knowledgeable and authoritative way.

- 4. **A general truth** introduces something about the topic which the reader can immediately agree with.
- 5. **A question** gets the reader’s attention by forcing them to think directly about the topic.

Exercise 3

Match each of the preceding strategies to the examples below.

- 1. “I dream of the realization of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent,” stated Nobel laureate Nelson Mandela.
- 2. How would life be different in a world without electricity?
- 3. About 70% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa have no regular access to electricity.
- 4. For most people in the developing world, electricity is much like air: they use as much as they like without ever wondering where it came from.
- 5. There are some who see the coming of night as the time to stop work and the time to start enjoying their lives.

Exercise 4

An effective hook is often based on the general topic or theme of the thesis. Which of the following hooks a–e would be appropriate to begin the following introductory paragraph? There may be more than one answer.

One growing trend worldwide against this way of life is the “slow life” movement, which seeks a return to a simpler, more balanced lifestyle based on the appreciation of food and eating traditions. The slow life movement has successfully led to more and more people eating healthier food, a preference for locally produced over imported food, and an increase in the demand for organic and naturally grown crops.

- a. People now have many more lifestyle choices than before.
- b. When people move to cities, do they forget their traditional values?
- c. Modern life for many people means enduring crowded streets, noise, endless advertisements, work, and stress.
- d. Many young people today consider themselves part of the “Me” generation.
- e. Although advances in technology were designed to make modern life easier and more convenient, many people have come to realize that they are busier and busier.

3. Writing building sentences

Building sentences help to provide a background to the essay and introduce any ideas or information necessary for the reader to understand the thesis. For example, building sentences could:

- explain the history of the topic.
- provide some statistics on the topic.
- mention the current situation regarding the topic.
- mention attitudes or opinions towards the topic.

Building sentences connect the hook, which introduces the essay topic in a very general way, to the thesis, which is a specific answer to the essay question. They can be presented:

- from general information to more specific information.
- using information familiar to the reader to information new to the reader.
- chronologically (from older information to newer information).

Consider the following example of building sentences organized using familiar to new information.

familiar
information

new
information

“I’d put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don’t have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.” With this statement, Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, recognized the capacity of the sun as a virtually limitless source of energy in 1931. However, although a time when oil and coal have been completely used up could be getting closer, the full potential of solar power is yet to be harnessed by mankind. Televisions, refrigerators, air conditioners, and all the other appliances common in the developed world require vast amounts of electricity, meaning that the world’s most powerful countries still very much depend on fossil fuels. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of South America, however, solar power is already changing the lives of people who have until now lived without a steady electricity supply. As low-cost solar panels become available, they are being used most effectively in some of the world’s poorest countries, which also happen to be some of the sunniest. Solar power is improving people’s lives in developing countries by providing efficient light safely, linking them to the global mobile community, and increasing their independence.

Exercise 5

Below are two introductions. For each, put the building sentences in the right order to connect the hook and thesis statement.

1. Topic: The popularity of yoga

Hook: In Sanskrit, the word *yoga* basically means “to unite.”

(____) Yoga classes are now found in cities and towns around the world, and they are filled with people ranging from top athletes, to senior citizens, to young children.

(____) They are drawn by the opportunity to escape the stress of modern life by refreshing their tired minds and bodies in the quiet company of others.

(____) Although this might seem like a group or team commitment, it is actually a liberating personal experience.

Thesis: Yoga is gaining in popularity around the world because it is accessible to all, reduces stress, and increases strength and flexibility.

2. Topic: The influence of Korean culture

Hook: South Korea has become the little country with the big culture in East Asia.

(____) The ongoing “wave” also reached China, Thailand, and other parts of Southeast Asia, where Korean pop culture, food, and fashion are trendy.

(____) Described as the “Korean Wave,” Korean culture first spread to Japan in the 1990s through popular TV dramas and films.

(____) This success has made Korean entertainers household names, and has created a great deal of interest in Korea and its culture.

Thesis: Although it has now passed, the Korean Wave succeeded in making the Korean entertainment industry an economic force, greatly increased tourism to Korea, and helped establish South Korea as a genuine influence in East Asia.

Exercise 6

For each topic below, read the hook and the thesis statement, and note down in point form what information should be included in the building sentences.

1. Topic: The threat of nuclear weapons

Hook: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once said, “A world without nuclear weapons would be less stable and more dangerous for all of us.”

Building sentences:

Thesis: Nuclear weapons remain a major threat in the world because of terrorism, continuing conflicts between nations, and radical dictators.

2. Topic: Students studying abroad

Hook: Is studying abroad something every student should do while in university?

Building sentences:

Thesis: The number of students studying abroad has been increasing because of the specialized programs available, the high status of a foreign degree, and the desire for a new experience.