

Academic writing

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The SIX STEPS OF WRITING PROCESS

Pre-writing

STEP ONE: Choose a topic. Before you write, your teacher gives you a specific assignment or some ideas of what to write about. If not, choose your topic yourself.

STEP TWO: Gather ideas. When you have a topic, think about what you will write about that topic.

STEP THREE: Organise. Decide which of the ideas you want to use and where you want to use them. Choose which idea to talk about first, which to talk about next, and which to talk about last.

Drafting

STEP FOUR: Write. Write your paragraph or essay from start to finish. Use your notes about your ideas and organisation.

Reviewing and revising

STEP FIVE: Review structure and content. Check what you have written. Read your writing silently to yourself or aloud, perhaps to a friend. Look for places where you can add more information, and check to see if you have any unnecessary information. Ask a classmate to exchange texts with you. Your classmate reads your text, and you read his or hers. Getting a reader's opinion is a good way to know if your writing is clear and effective. Learning to give opinions about other people's writing helps you to improve your own. You may want to go on to step six now and revise the structure and content of your text before you proofread it.

Rewriting

STEP SIX:

Revise structure and content. Use your ideas from step five to rewrite your text, making improvements to the structure and content. You might need to explain something more clearly, or add more details. You may even need to change your organisation so that your text is more logical. Together, steps five and six can be called *editing*.

Proofread. Read your text again. This time, check your spelling and grammar and think about the words you have chosen to use.

Make final corrections. Check that you have corrected the errors you discovered in steps five and six and make any other changes you want to make. Now your text is finished!

Steps five and six can be repeated many times.

How to choose a topic?

- Choosing and narrowing a topic.

- Choose a topic that isn't too *narrow* (limited, brief). A narrow topic will not have enough ideas to write about. *The ages of my brothers and sisters* is too narrow. You can't write very much about it.
- Choose a topic that isn't too *broad* (general). A broad topic will have too many ideas for just one paragraph. Most paragraphs are five to ten sentences long. *Schools* is too general. There are thousands of things you could say about it.

A student could narrow this topic by choosing one aspect of schools to discuss.

schools ➡ *secondary schools in my country*
popular school clubs
university entrance exams

Brainstorming

What is brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a way of gathering ideas about a topic. Think of a storm: thousands of drops of rain, all coming down together. Now, imagine thousands of ideas 'raining' down onto your paper! When you brainstorm, write down every idea that comes to you. Don't worry now about whether the ideas are good or silly, useful or not. You can decide that later. Right now, you are gathering as many ideas as you can.

You will learn three types of brainstorming in this unit: *making a list*, *freewriting*, and *mapping*.



Making a list

Write single words, phrases, or sentences that are connected to your topic. Look at this list a student made when brainstorming ideas to write about her topic, 'What should I study at university?'



history—learning about the past
maths (too difficult, not interesting?)
What job do I want later?
English for work? Travel?
writing?
science—biology, chemistry
I don't like physics!
journalism
I like reading—literature?
art—drawing, painting, sculpture
photography?
studying / homework
friends / social life

Freewriting

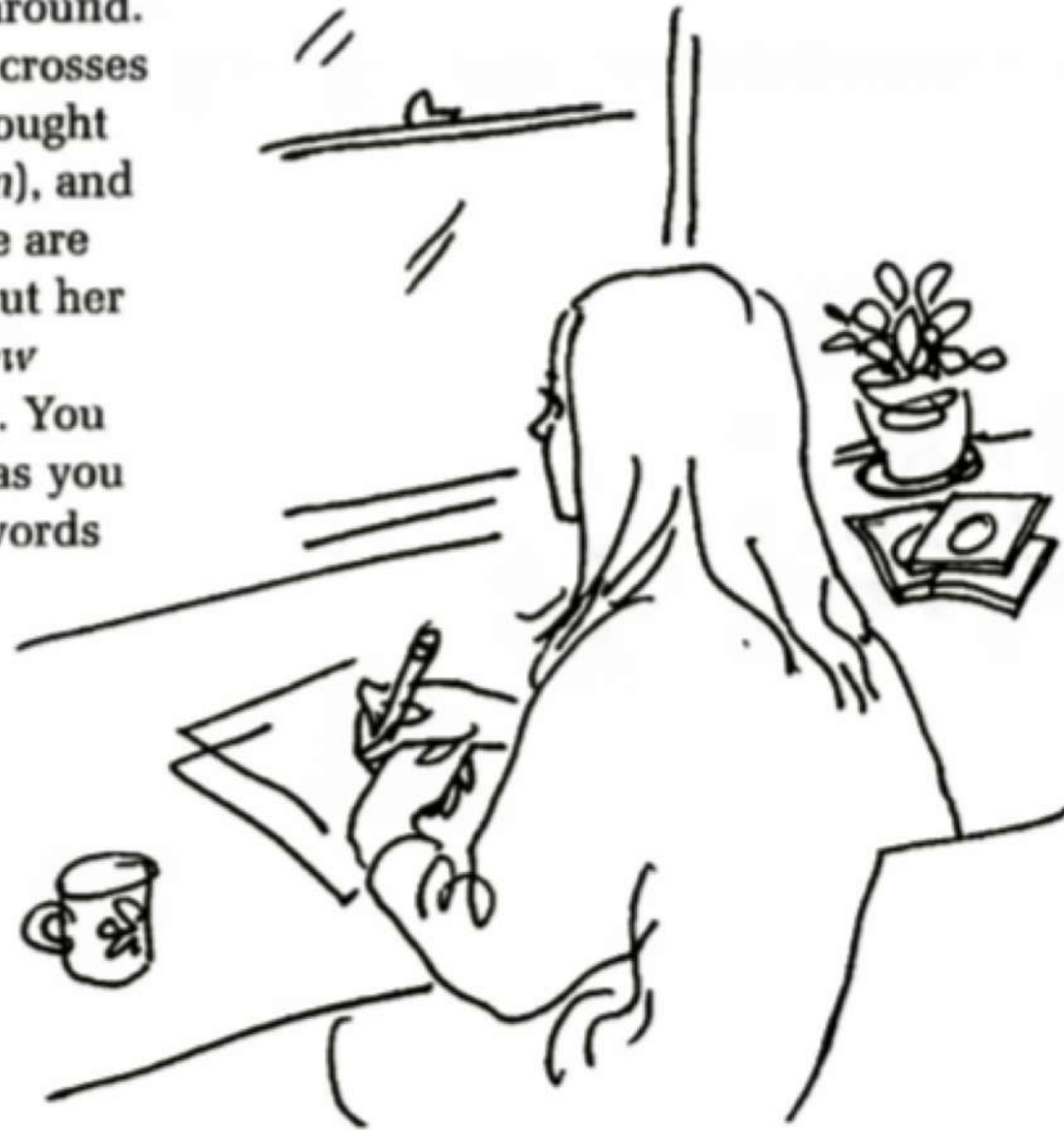
When you freewrite, you write whatever comes into your head about your topic, without stopping. Most freewriting exercises are short—just five or ten minutes.

Freewriting helps you practice *fluency* (writing quickly and easily). When you freewrite, you do not need to worry about *accuracy* (having correct grammar and spelling). Don't check your dictionary when you freewrite. Don't stop if you make a mistake. Just keep writing!

Here is an example of a student's freewriting:

There are too so many subjects to study at university, it is difficult to choose one. I've always had good marks in maths, but I don't like it very much. I don't like physical physics or any science very much. Writing—I've always liked writing. Would journalism be a good course to take? Newspapers have pictures, too, so maybe photography would be good. I'm maybe definitely looking forward to meeting new friends at university. And what about reading? Reading is a part of any course, but literature includes a lot of reading and it probably includes a lot of writing, too.

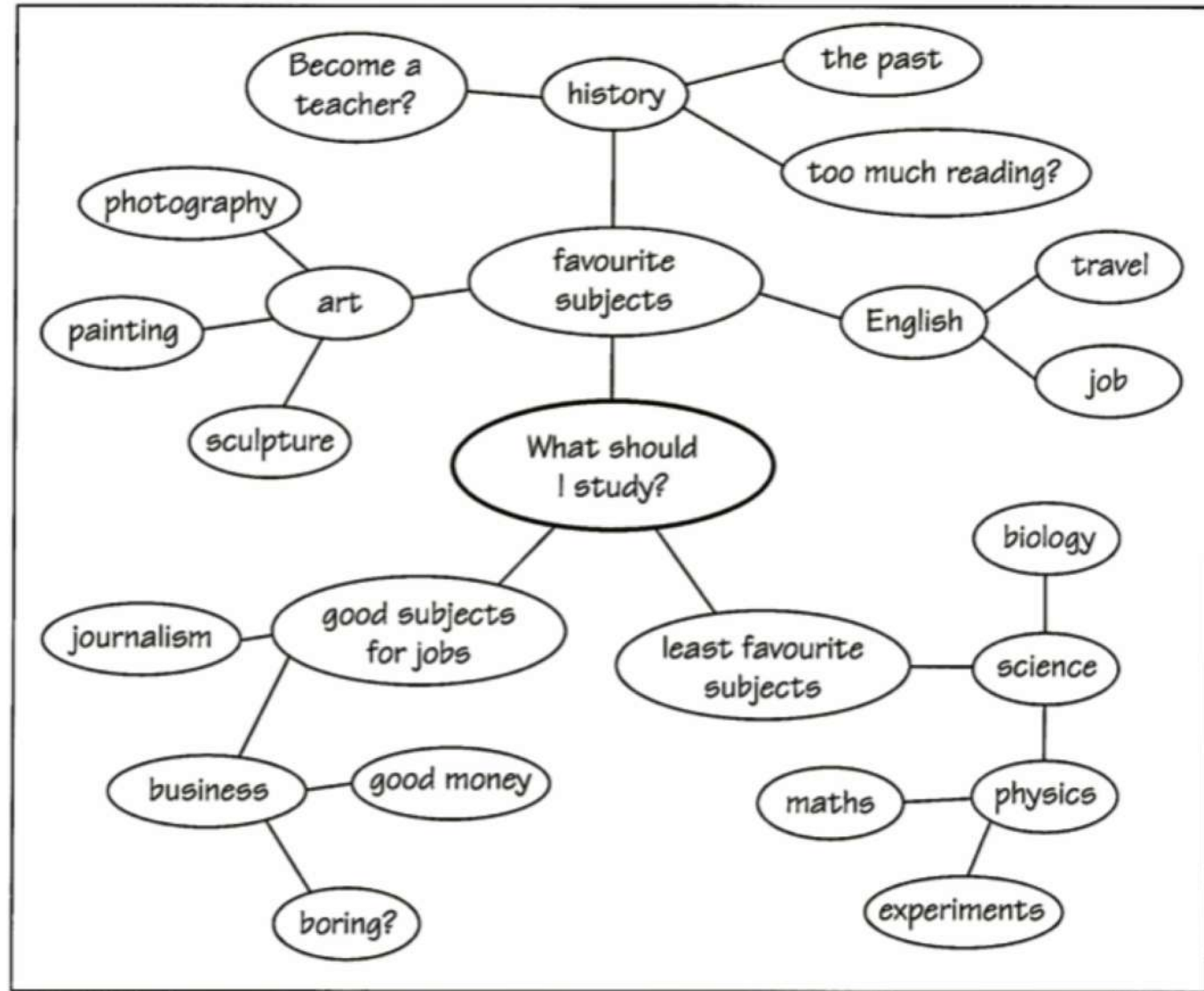
Notice how the writer's ideas jump around. When she makes a mistake, she just crosses it out and continues writing. One thought (*writing*) leads to another (*journalism*), and then to another (*photography*). There are some details that are not exactly about her topic (*looking forward to meeting new friends*), but that's OK in freewriting. You want to get as many ideas on paper as you can. You can take out unnecessary words and sentences later.



Mapping

To make a map, use a whole sheet of paper, and write your topic in the middle, with a circle around it. Then put the next idea in a circle above or below your topic, and connect the circles with lines. The lines show that the two ideas are related.

The example below shows a map of 'What should I study at university?' The writer connected *favourite subjects* to the main idea. *Art* and *English* are connected to *favourite subjects* to show that they are related.



A Map example.

How to edit

After you have gathered plenty of ideas, you will need to go back and edit them. This is the time to choose which ideas are the most interesting, and which are the most *relevant* to (important or necessary for) your topic. Of course, you can still add new ideas if you think of something else while you are re-reading your list. For example, the student writing 'What should I study in college?' edited her list like this:



history—learning about the past

~~maths (too difficult, not interesting?)~~ *Not interesting to me.*

What job do I want later? *Describe more.*

English for work? Travel?

writing? *Important in many subjects.*

~~science—biology, chemistry~~

~~I don't like physics!~~ *I don't want to study science!*

journalism

I like reading—literature?

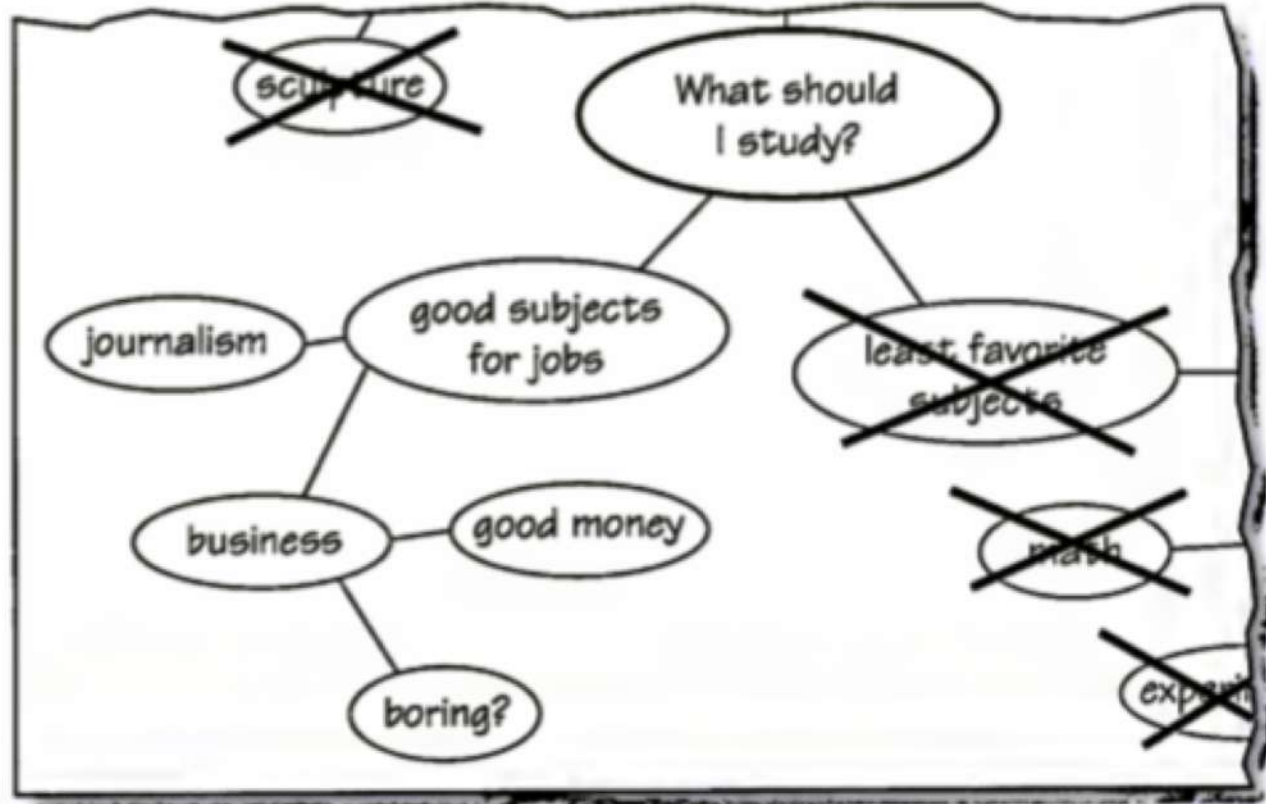
art—drawing, painting, sculpture

photography?

studying / homework *What about it?*

~~friends / social life~~ *Not related.*

To edit freewriting, cross out sentences or parts of sentences that aren't related. You can add more ideas in the margin or add more sentences at the bottom. To edit a map, cross out circles that don't belong, and add new ones if you get more ideas. You might also change the lines you have drawn.

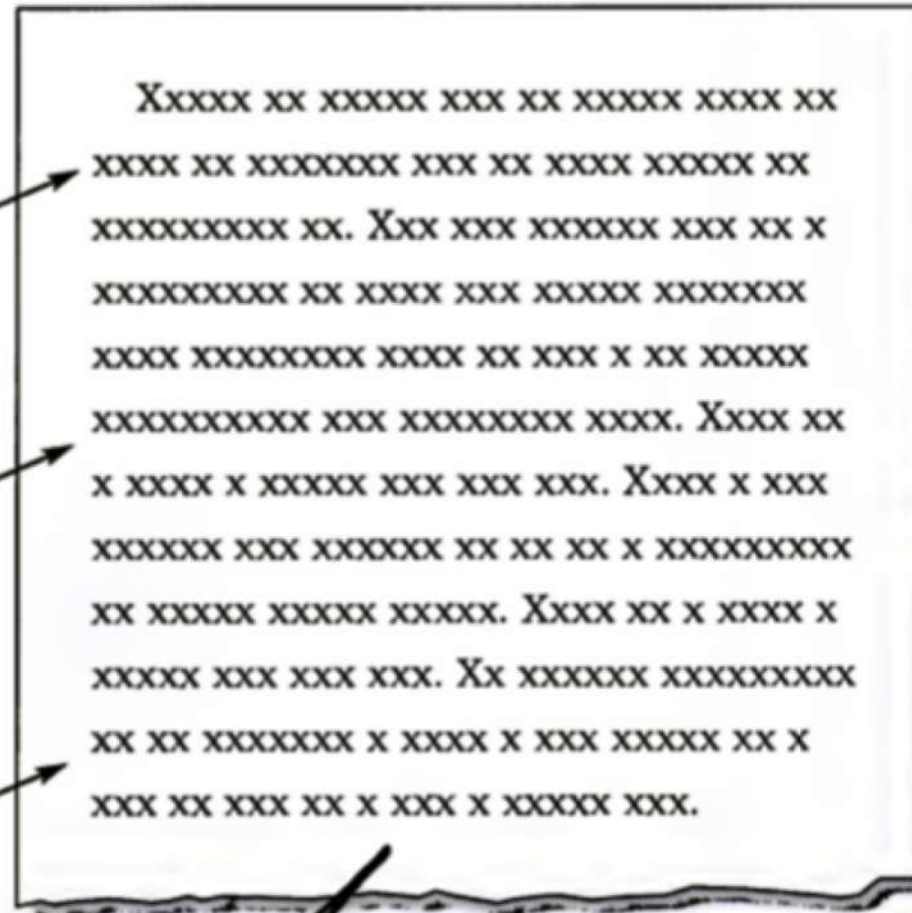


The structure of a paragraph

What makes a paragraph?

A paragraph has three basic parts:

1. **The topic sentence.** This is the main idea of the paragraph. It is usually the first sentence of the paragraph, and it is the most general sentence of the paragraph.
2. **The supporting sentences.** These are sentences that talk about or explain the topic sentence. They are more detailed ideas that follow the topic sentence.
3. **The concluding sentence.** This may be found as the last sentence of a paragraph. It can finish a paragraph by repeating the main idea or just giving a final comment about the topic.



The development of a paragraph

Paragraph development

After you have chosen a topic and written a topic sentence, you *develop* your main idea by adding more information to explain what you mean. This unit will explain three common ways to develop a paragraph: giving *details*, giving an *explanation*, and giving an *example*.

Details

Details are specific points that tell more about a general statement. Read this brochure from a health club. Notice the details that help develop the paragraph.



ATLAS HEALTH CENTRE

You'll love working out at the Atlas Health Centre, and you'll love what it does for you! We have state-of-the-art exercise equipment in large, air-conditioned rooms. You can work out alone or with the help of one of our professional personal trainers. If you like exercising with friends, join an aerobics or swimming class — or even try kickboxing! Our staff nutrition experts are always on hand to talk with you about health issues. When you've finished, you can relax with a whirlpool bath or a sauna. Come and exercise with us at Atlas, and you'll soon be feeling strong and looking good.

Explanation

An explanation tells the reader what something means or how something works.

'A stitch in time saves nine.' My mother, who likes sewing, used this simple saying to teach me the value of working on problems when they are still small. Originally, the saying referred to sewing—if you have a small hole in a shirt, you can repair it with one stitch. But if you wait, the hole will get larger, and it will take you nine stitches. This simple sentence reminds me to take care of small problems before they become big problems.



Example

An example is a specific person, place, thing, or event that supports an idea or statement. The below paragraph includes an example from the writer's own experience. Identify the topic sentence.

Even when a first date is a disaster, a couple can still become good friends. For example, my first date with Greg was terrible. I thought he was coming to pick me up at 6.30, but instead he came at 6.00. I didn't have time to do my hair, and my make-up looked messy. When I got into his car, I scraped my leg against the car door and tore my tights. Next, he took me to an Italian restaurant for dinner, and I accidentally dropped some spaghetti on my shirt. Then we went to a film. Greg asked me which film I wanted to see, and I chose a romantic comedy. He fell asleep during the film, and I got angry. Now that Greg and I are good friends, we can look back and laugh at how terrible that first date was!

The structure of an essay

The structure of an essay

➤ The three main parts of an essay

The introduction

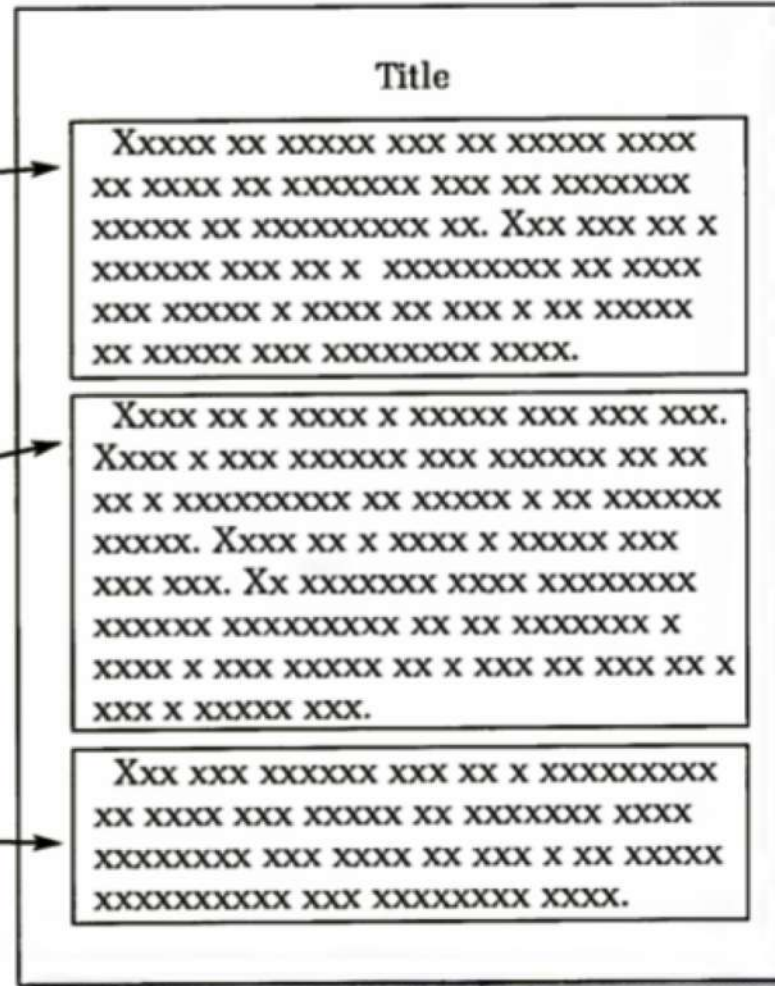
This is the first paragraph of an essay. It explains the topic with general ideas. It also has a *thesis statement*. This is a sentence that gives the main idea. It usually comes at or near the end of the paragraph.

The main body

These are the paragraphs that explain and support the thesis statement and come between the introduction and the conclusion. There must be one or more paragraphs in the main body of an essay.

The conclusion

This is the last paragraph of an essay. It summarises or restates the thesis and the supporting ideas of the essay.



What is a thesis statement?

The *thesis statement* is the sentence that tells the main idea of the whole essay. It can be compared to a topic sentence, which gives the main idea of a paragraph. It usually comes at or near the end of the introductory paragraph.

Writing a strong thesis statement

- A thesis statement gives the author's opinion or states an important idea about the topic. It should give an idea that can be discussed and explained with supporting ideas:

The qualifications for getting into university in my country are unreasonable.

When studying a foreign language, there are several ways to improve your use of the language.

These are strong thesis statements. They can be discussed or explained.

- A thesis statement should not be a sentence that only gives a fact about the topic:

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.

- A thesis statement should not state two sides of an argument equally:

There are advantages and disadvantages to using nuclear power.

This could be a topic sentence, but it is not a thesis statement. It gives two sides of an argument without giving a clear opinion of support or disagreement. It could be revised like this:

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

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

What is an outline?

An outline is a list of the information you will put in your essay. You can see an example of an outline on page 65.

An outline ...

- begins with the essay's thesis statement.
- shows the organisation of the essay.
- tells what ideas you will discuss and shows which ideas will come first, second, and so on.
- ends with the essay's conclusion.

Writing an outline before you write an essay will ...

- show you what to write before you actually begin writing.
- help make your essay well organised and clearly focused.
- keep you from forgetting any important points.



How to write an outline

Before writing an outline, you must go through the usual process of gathering ideas, editing them, and deciding on a topic for your writing. Writing an outline can be a very useful way of organising your ideas and seeing how they will work together.

To show how the ideas work together, number them. To avoid confusion, use several different types of numbers and letters to show the organisation of the ideas. Use Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, VI, etc.) for your essay's main ideas: your introduction and thesis statement, your main body paragraphs, and your conclusion. Write all of these first, before going into more detail anywhere.

- I. Introduction**
- II. First main idea**
- III. Second main idea**
- IV. Third main idea**
- V. Conclusion**

Next, fill in more information for the paragraphs in the main body by using capital Roman letters (A, B, C, etc.). Use one letter for each supporting idea in your main body paragraph. Complete this information for each paragraph in the main body before going into more detail.

- I. Introduction
- II. First main idea
 - A. First supporting point
 - B. Second supporting point
 - ... and so on.

Finally, use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) to give details for your supporting points. Not every supporting point will have details, and some points will have several. It is not important to have the same number of details for every supporting point.

- I. Introduction
- II. First main idea
 - A. First supporting point
 - 1. First detail
 - 2. Second detail
 - B. Second supporting point
 - 1. First detail
 - 2. Second detail
 - ... and so on.

Don't Support Nuclear Energy!

- I.** Nuclear power is not a good energy source for the world.
- II.** Very expensive
 - A.** Nuclear fuel is expensive
 - B.** Nuclear power stations are expensive to build and operate
 - 1. Cost of construction
 - 2. Cost of training workers
 - 3. Cost of safety features
- III.** Nuclear materials are not safe
 - A.** Nuclear fuels are dangerous
 - 1. Mining fuels produces radioactive gas
 - 2. Working with radioactive fuels can harm workers
 - B.** Nuclear waste products are dangerous
 - 1. Very radioactive
 - 2. Difficult to dispose of or store safely
- IV.** There is a great possibility of accidents
 - A.** Nuclear power stations can fail
 - 1. Three Mile Island, USA (1979)
 - 2. Tarapur, India (1992)
 - 3. Darlington, Canada (1992)
 - B.** Workers can make mistakes
 - 1. Chernobyl, USSR (1986)
 - 2. Kola, Russia (1991)
 - 3. Tokaimura, Japan (1999)
 - C.** Natural disasters can occur
 - 1. Earthquake: Kozloduy, Bulgaria (1977)
 - 2. Tornado: Moruroa, the Pacific (1981)
- V.** Because of the cost and the danger, the world should develop different types of energy to replace nuclear power.

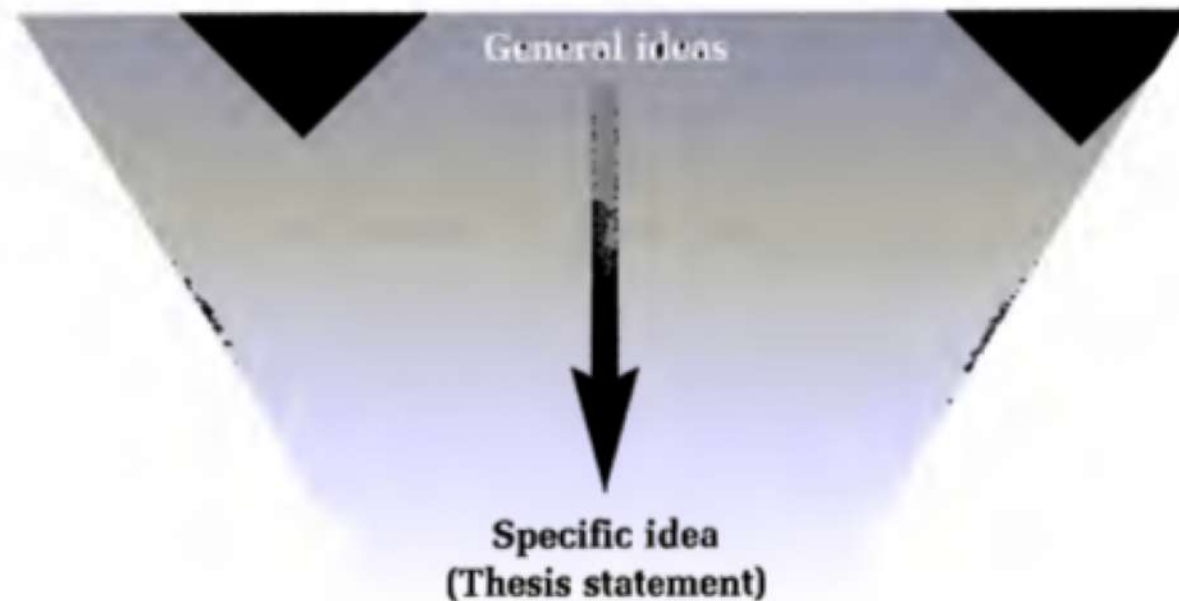
Introductions and Conclusions

- Without introduction and conclusions, an essay is just a group of paragraphs. The introduction and the conclusion work together to make the topic and main ideas of the essay clear to the reader.

The introduction ...

- is usually five to ten sentences.
- catches the reader's interest.
- gives the general topic of the essay.
- gives background information about the topic.
- states the main point (the thesis statement) of the essay.

The introduction is often organised by giving the most general ideas first and then leading to the most specific idea, which is the thesis statement, like this:



How to write a strong introduction

A strong introduction ...

- introduces the topic clearly.
- gives several sentences of information about the topic.
- states the thesis (the main idea) of the essay.

Any of the following will make an introduction weak:

- It doesn't give enough information about the topic or gives too much information about it.
- It talks about too many different topics.
- It does not state a clear thesis.

How to make an introduction interesting

To make an introductory paragraph interesting for the reader, you can include ...

- interesting facts or statistics.
- a personal story or example.
- an interesting quotation.



The importance of a conclusion

The conclusion is the final paragraph of the essay. A good concluding paragraph ...

- summarises the main points of the essay.
- restates the thesis (using different words).
- makes a final comment about the essay's main idea.
- may emphasise an action that you would like the reader to take.

Don't introduce new ideas in a conclusion. A conclusion only restates or gives further commentary on ideas discussed in the essay.

Unity and Coherence

What is unity?

Unity in writing is the connection of all ideas to a single topic. In an essay, all ideas should relate to the thesis statement, and the supporting ideas in a main body paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

What is coherence?

Coherence is related to unity. Ideas that are arranged in a clear and logical way are coherent. When a text is unified and coherent, the reader can easily understand the main points.

Chronology	Comparison	Contrast	Additional information	Examples	Cause and effect	Concluding ideas
<i>before</i> <i>after</i> <i>next</i> <i>since</i> <i>first, second</i> <i>while</i> <i>when</i>	<i>likewise</i> <i>compared to</i> <i>similarly</i> <i>as ... as</i> <i>and</i>	<i>however</i> <i>on the other hand</i> <i>but</i> <i>yet</i> <i>in spite of</i> <i>in contrast</i> <i>although</i> <i>instead</i>	<i>and</i> <i>also</i> <i>in addition</i> <i>in fact</i> <i>furthermore</i> <i>moreover</i> <i>Another ...</i> <i>is/was</i>	<i>for example</i> <i>in general</i> <i>generally</i> <i>for instance</i> <i>specifically</i> <i>in particular</i>	<i>therefore</i> <i>so</i> <i>thus</i> <i>as a result</i> <i>since</i> <i>because</i>	<i>in conclusion</i> <i>in summary</i> <i>finally</i> <i>therefore</i> <i>to conclude</i> <i>to summarise</i>

1. of focusing on a patient's health problems, Chinese medicine tries to make the patient's whole body well again. 2. , doctors of Chinese medicine believe that inside people, there are two types of energy. The first type of energy, called 'yin', is quiet and passive. The other type of energy, called 'yang', is active. ... When there is an imbalance—too much yin, 3. —a person becomes unhealthy. A doctor of Chinese medicine doesn't try to stop a person's cough by giving a cough medicine. 4. , the doctor gives a mixture of herbs that will restore balance in the patient's body. 5. , when the body is in balance, the cough will stop naturally.

Use transition words to fill in the blanks...

1. of focusing on a patient's health problems, Chinese medicine tries to make the patient's whole body well again. 2. , doctors of Chinese medicine believe that inside people, there are two types of energy. The first type of energy, called 'yin', is quiet and passive. The other type of energy, called 'yang', is active. ... When there is an imbalance—too much yin, 3. —a person becomes unhealthy. A doctor of Chinese medicine doesn't try to stop a person's cough by giving a cough medicine. 4. , the doctor gives a mixture of herbs that will restore balance in the patient's body. 5. , when the body is in balance, the cough will stop naturally.

Lastly

- Practice writing.
- Review among peers.
- Source: [Academic Writing : from paragraph to essay.](#)