

The Basic Outline of a Paper

The following outline shows a basic format for most academic papers. No matter what length the paper needs to be, it should still follow the format of having an introduction, body, and conclusion. Read over what typically goes in each section of the paper. Use the back of this handout to outline information for your specific paper.

I. Introduction

The introduction should have **some** of the following elements, depending on the type of paper:

- Start with an attention grabber: a short story, example, statistic, or historical context that introduces the paper topic
- Give an overview of any issues involved with the subject
- Define of any key terminology need to understand the topic
- Quote or paraphrase sources revealing the controversial nature of the subject (argumentative papers only)
- Highlight background information on the topic needed to understand the direction of the paper
- Write an antithesis paragraph, presenting the primary opposing views (argumentative paper only)

The introduction must end with a THESIS statement (a 1 to 2 sentences in length):

- Tell what the overall paper will focus on
- Briefly outline the main points in the paper

II. Body

- Clearly present the main points of the paper as listed in the thesis
- Give strong examples, details, and explanations to support each main points
- If an argumentative paper, address any counterarguments and refute those arguments
- If a research paper, use strong evidence from sources—paraphrases, summaries, and quotations that support the main points

III. Conclusion

- Restate your thesis from the introduction in different words
- Briefly summarize each main point found in the body of the paper (avoid going over 2 sentences for each point)
- Give a statement of the consequences of not embracing the position (argumentative paper only)
- End with a strong clincher statement: an appropriate, meaningful final sentence that ties the whole point of the paper together (may refer back to the attention grabber)

Additional Tips

- Decide on the thesis and main points first
- You do not need to start writing your paper with the introduction
- Try writing the thesis and body first; then go back and figure out how to best introduce the body and conclude the paper
- Use transitions between main points and between examples within the main points
- Always keep your thesis in the forefront of your mind while writing; everything in your paper must point back to the thesis
- Use the back of this handout to make an outline of your paper

Paper Topic: _____ Audience: _____

I. Introduction

Possible ideas for the introduction (see front side of handout for suggestions):

Thesis Statement (Usually the last sentence(s) in the introduction):

II. Body (A paper may have a few or many main points; decide how many your paper will need)

Main Point: _____

Examples/Details/Explanations:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Main Point: _____

Examples/Details/Explanations:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Main Point: _____

Examples/Details/Explanations:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Main Point: _____

Examples/Details/Explanations:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

III. Conclusion

Reworded Thesis (Usually found near the beginning of the conclusion):

Other Ideas to Conclude:

Clincher Ideas: _____

Argumentative Paper Format

**Please note that this is only a sample format. There are multiple ways to organize an argumentative paper*

▪ INTRODUCTION

- 1-2 paragraphs tops
- **PURPOSE:** To set up and state one's claim
- **OPTIONAL ELEMENTS**
 - Make your introductory paragraph **interesting**. How can you draw your readers in?
 - What **background information**, if any, do we need to know in order to understand your claim? If you don't follow this paragraph with a background information paragraph, please insert that info here.
- **REQUIRED ELEMENTS**
 - If you're arguing about a literary work—state author + title
 - If you're arguing about an issue or theory – provide brief explanation or your of issue/theory.
 - If you're arguing about a film—state director, year + title
 - **STATE** your claim at the end of your introductory paragraph

▪ BACKGROUND PARAGRAPH

- 1-2 paragraphs tops; Optional (can omit for some papers). Also, sometimes this info is incorporated into the introduction paragraph (see above).
- **PURPOSE:** Lays the foundation for proving your argument.
- Will often include:
 - Summary of works being discussed
 - Definition of key terms
 - Explanation of key theories

▪ SUPPORTING EVIDENCE PARAGRAPH #1

- **PURPOSE:** To prove your argument. Usually is one paragraph but it can be longer.
- **Topic Sentence:** What is one item, fact, detail, or example you can tell your readers that will help them better understand your claim/paper topic? Your answer should be the topic sentence for this paragraph.
- **Explain Topic Sentence:** Do you need to explain your topic sentence? If so, do so here.
- **Introduce Evidence:** Introduce your evidence either in a few words (As Dr. Brown states "...") or in a full sentence ("To understand this issue we first need to look at statistics).
- **State Evidence:** What supporting evidence (reasons, examples, facts, statistics, and/or quotations) can you include to prove/support/explain your topic sentence?
- **Explain Evidence:** How should we read or interpret the evidence you are providing us? How does this evidence prove the point you are trying to make in this paragraph? Can be opinion based and is often at least 1-3 sentences.
- **Concluding Sentence:** End your paragraph with a concluding sentence that reasserts how the topic sentence of this paragraph helps up better understand and/or prove your paper's overall claim.

- **SUPPORTING EVIDENCE PARAGRAPH #2, 3, 4 etc.**
 - Repeat above

- **COUNTERARGUMENT PARAGRAPH**
 - **PURPOSE:** To anticipate your reader's objections; make yourself sound more objective and reasonable.
 - Optional; usually 1-2 paragraphs tops
 - What possible argument might your reader pose against your argument and/or some aspect of your reasoning? Insert one or more of those arguments here and refute them.
 - End paragraph with a concluding sentence that reasserts your paper's claim as a whole.

- **CONCLUSION PART 1: SUM UP PARAGRAPH**
 - **PURPOSE:** Remind readers of your argument and supporting evidence
 - Conclusion you were most likely taught to write in High School
 - Restates your paper's overall claim and supporting evidence

- **CONCLUSION PART 2: YOUR "SO WHAT" PARAGRAPH**
 - **PURPOSE:** To illustrate to your instructor that you have thought critically and analytically about this issue.
 - Your conclusion should not simply restate your intro paragraph. If your conclusion says almost the exact same thing as your introduction, it may indicate that you have not done enough critical thinking during the course of your essay (since you ended up right where you started).
 - Your conclusion should tell us why we should care about your paper. What is the significance of your claim? Why is it important to you as the writer or to me as the reader? What information should you or I take away from this?
 - *Your conclusion should create a sense of movement to a more complex understanding of the subject of your paper. By the end of your essay, you should have worked through your ideas enough so that your reader understands what you have argued and is ready to hear the larger point (i.e. the "so what") you want to make about your topic.*
 - Your conclusion should serve as the climax of your paper. So, save your strongest analytical points for the end of your essay, and use them to drive your conclusion
 - Vivid, concrete language is as important in a conclusion as it is elsewhere--perhaps more essential, *since the conclusion determines the reader's final impression of your essay.* Do not leave them with the impression that your argument was vague or unsure.
 - **WARNING:** It's fine to introduce new information or quotations in your conclusions, as long as the new points grow from your argument. New points might be more general, answering the "so what" question; they might be quite specific. Just avoid making new claims that need lots of additional support.