

Essay Development

Once you have chosen a topic for your paper, establish an outline to follow. An outline should be easy to understand and clearly communicate the purpose of your paper. After outlining, it becomes easy to add, remove, or change details in your paper as you research your topic and shape your ideas. See the examples of informal and formal outlines on pages 12-14 of *A Writer's Reference*.

The five-paragraph essay model includes an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Using this basic format, you can create an outline for virtually any writing assignment. You must decide (based on the assignment's specific requirements listed in the prompt) how many paragraphs your essay will have and how long your paper will be, but it should include these three essential parts:

- **Introduction** (includes a hook, background information, and thesis);
- **Body Paragraphs** (include main points and supporting examples discussed in detailed paragraphs);
- **Conclusion** (restates the thesis in an original way to include what you/the reader learned from your essay and uses a conclusion strategy).

1. Introduction

An introduction is your only chance to make a good first impression on readers, so draft an effective one. It should identify what your paper will be about and grab the reader's attention. It usually includes your thesis statement, which can be made up of more than one sentence (see Thesis section below). Be aware that you do not have to draft the introduction first; doing that can actually make it more difficult. Many writers draft the introduction last to ensure that it reflects the content of the paper. An introduction should do the following:

- **Hook the reader's attention** on the subject and arouse curiosity;
- **Give background information** by focusing your topic and purpose (informative or persuasive) and quickly summarizing the history or context of the problem;
- **Provide your thesis statement**, including the topic, claim, and main points of the essay (evidence or reasons that support the claim). Below are more details about the thesis statement.

Thesis

A thesis is the answer to a research question; it should state the main points of your paper's discussion and how you will inform the reader about the topic. The thesis helps familiarize the reader with your paper's outline and main ideas.

A thesis basically includes the following (in any order):

[topic + claim + evidence]

or

[what your paper will discuss + the message/position + main points or reasons supporting the claim]

Here is a **thesis example** applying this concept: "Pennies should remain a part of America's currency because they ¹increase government profits, ²save consumers money, and ³are vital to America's history and culture."

Topic = pennies;

Claim = should remain a part of America's currency;

Evidence, or Main Point 1 = increase government profits;

Evidence, or Main Point 2 = save consumers money;

Evidence, or Main Point 3 = are vital to America's history and culture.

Commonly Used Thesis Formats

For:	Include in your thesis:	Mention:
Persuasive Essay/Proposal	Topic, claim, evidence	Possible solutions to the problem
Literary Analysis	Title, author, theme, literary elements (character, tone, setting, point of view, climax, etc.)	Devices or tools used by the author to support the theme (message)
Rhetorical Analysis	Topic, author's claim, evidence	Rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, pathos) as types of evidence
Compare/Contrast Essay or Argumentative Analysis (two or more perspectives on the same issue)	Topic, individuals/groups involved, their varying claims, evidence/reasons	Possible solutions to the problem (proposed by you or involved parties)

2. Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph should focus on a main point/evidence that supports your claim (previously mentioned in the thesis statement). Remember that main points and evidence should be discussed **in the same order** listed in the thesis; otherwise, you risk confusing the reader.

One way to build thorough, yet concise, paragraphs is to use the following step-by-step process to evaluate (and support) your main points:

- **Begin with transition words or phrases** that introduce or end subject matter and lead the readers to the next subject. Transition words link paragraphs, steps, and ideas. They keep the paper flowing in a logical order;
- **Include a topic sentence**, along with transitions, that introduces the paragraph's subject matter;
- **Introduce the paragraph's main discussion point**, following the topic sentence, by giving an **example** (quote, summary, paraphrase, statistic, or story) from your text or research. Cite it properly using MLA format;
- **Analyze this example** by stating why it is important or relevant to the reader and/or the claim;
- **Interpret this example** further by telling the audience what it means and how it supports your thesis statement.

By adhering to this evaluative pattern, you are logically connecting your thesis, topic sentences, and details in a way that supports your claim and conclusion. This framework helps develop a paper that coherently synthesizes about 33 percent of facts and recorded data (or expert opinions) with your own analysis and ideas (the remaining 66 percent of your paper's composition). This is an ideal ratio for most assignments. Refer to the prompt for further instructions.

3. Conclusion

A conclusion is your last chance to tie the paragraphs together and assure that readers have understood your purpose and ideas. An effective conclusion will **restate the thesis** (in a different way) and **summarize the main points** of each paragraph. In some cases, the instructor may request that the writer include a final opinion on the topic or a call to action. However, the conclusion is rarely the place to introduce new information.

For more help with constructing an essay, consult other Blinn Writing Center handouts: "Introductions and Conclusions," "How to Write a Thesis Statement," "Thesis Statement Types & Models," "Transition Words and Phrases," "Further Developing an Essay," "Revision Tips," and "Know That It Flows." Another valuable resource is the handbook, *A Writer's Reference*, required in most Blinn College English classes.