

Composing Strong Body Paragraphs

A successful body paragraph serves to:

- present a point of discussion
- provide evidence for your position on that point
- tie that point back into the overall argument of the thesis statement

No two body paragraphs are exactly alike; however, when writing an academic essay, there is a basic formula to follow to make sure your point is well-developed and fits with your argument.

Each sentence in the paragraph plays a specific role. A typical academic body paragraph is between five and eight sentences, and it should follow this format:

- 1. TOPIC SENTENCE:** It is important to have a strong, declarative topic sentence. This will help to organize your thoughts and guide your reader easily through your argument. The topic sentence should state your specific, arguable claim to be proven in the paragraph. Be direct; don't try to put too much information into the first sentence.
 - 2. LEAD-UP TO EVIDENCE:** The sentence immediately following the topic sentence can be used to elaborate on the specific focus. This should be done only to clarify meaning, not to cram in unnecessary or distracting information. This sentence can also serve to give context to the evidence about to be presented. If no elaboration is necessary, move on to presenting evidence.
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- 3. PRESENT EVIDENCE:** By the third sentence, you should be introducing your evidence to support your focus in the paragraph.
 - The evidence should come from either the primary source being considered in the paper or from a scholarly or highly trustworthy source such as a journal article or newspaper.
 - Do not blindside your reader by starting a sentence with a quote. All cited information and passages should be introduced with a signal phrase that lets the reader know you are now integrating information from an outside source. For example: In his article discussing the impressive complexity of the Mayan calendar, the scholar P.J. Franklin states, ‘the Mayan culture had developed the 365 day calendar almost 2,000 years before the Europeans did in the 1500s’ (Franklin 2). The introductory phrase in the sentence creates a brief context for the evidence so that the reader knows where it is coming from.
- 4. EXPLAIN EVIDENCE:** Immediately following the evidence, you should explain the exact meaning to be taken from that evidence. What specifically does that quote/statistic/fact demonstrate? Write the meaning to be taken from it in your own words so the reader understands it the way you understand it. Even if the meaning seems obvious to you, make sure to state it so the reader does not misinterpret the evidence from the way you intended.
- 5. TIE IT UP:** The last sentence or two of your paragraph should tie the point you just made clearly and concretely back to your thesis statement. It should explain how this point fits into your larger argument as a whole.

DROP-IN HOURS

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Friday: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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