

BODY PARAGRAPHS

WHAT IS A BODY PARAGRAPH?

A body paragraph is any paragraph in the middle of an essay or paper that comes after the introduction but before the conclusion. Typically, body paragraphs support and present information about each of the main topics related to the thesis statement or central message of the paper. Body paragraphs typically contain the writer's examination or analysis of data and evidence.

BODY ORGANIZATION

Each body paragraph is made up of sentences, and those are structured to create an introduction, body, and conclusion for the paragraph.

A strong body paragraph contains the following four parts:

1. Transitions

A word, phrase, or sentence that connects one body paragraph to the others, creating seamless movement from one idea to the next. Transitions appear at the beginning and/or end of a paragraph, often in the topic and conclusion sentences.

2. Topic sentence

A sentence that introduces what the paragraph is about and explicitly ties the idea within that paragraph back to the paper's thesis statement or central message.

3. Supporting sentences

These sentences make up the substance of the body paragraph and support the topic sentence with evidence and analysis. Evidence that supports the main idea of the paragraph can include quotations or paraphrases from a source text, scientific data, personal anecdotes, observations, survey responses, and more. Because the use of evidence must be justified, writers include their own analysis of the evidence.

4. Conclusion (Summary) sentence

A sentence that sums up and reasserts the paragraph's original point in light of the supporting evidence, reaffirms the analysis of that evidence, and might draw connections to ideas presented in other sentences.

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AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

When writing body paragraphs, students commonly make the following errors that should be avoided:

1. Follow a 5-paragraph essay structure.

In most academic writing situations, a 5-paragraph essay structure is not necessary. It's a useful tool to first learn how to organize your ideas, but it is not required, or even encouraged, by most professors. You might want to create an outline or list of the ideas you want to include in your paper to help you determine which need their own paragraph. The number of ideas you have will tell you roughly how many paragraphs you will need.

2. Cover too many ideas in a paragraph.

A paragraph typically only covers one idea. If you tackle too many ideas, the paragraph can get long, which makes it difficult for readers to keep track of your points. To minimize confusion, have each paragraph only focus on one identifiable main idea that is stated in your topic sentence. You can always break up a paragraph if you start writing about other ideas or if you have one overarching idea with several supporting ideas in one paragraph.

EXAMPLE

In order to get a better sense of how a body paragraph works, let's look at an example. This thesis statement and body paragraph are from a sample student literary analysis essay.

SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENT

Upon a closer analysis of Amy Tan's short story "Two Kinds," one can argue that the mother does not allow her daughter to become her own person and that the pressure from the mother hinders the daughter.

SAMPLE BODY PARAGRAPH

The following sample is a general model to help you identify how the components of a body paragraph work. You will adapt this model with every paper you write; just make sure that each body paragraph contains these essential elements, even if the specific ways you integrate each look very different

① transition → ① Upon further examination, ② the mother's constant pressure on the daughter is ← ② topic sentence
beginning to wear on her. ③ Jing-mei's mother consistently gives her daughter tests and the expectations to succeed are very high. As the daughter states right after she fails to perform well at the climatic piano recital, "After seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, that raised hopes and failed expectation" (Tan 152). Tan's use of bleak diction like "die," "hated," and "failed," emphasizes Jing-mei's vulnerable and upset state of expectations, constant tests, and demands for success, begin to eat away at Jing-mei. It begins to impact the daughter's emotional states. ④ The consistent disappoint pushes Jing-mei to the point where she is tempted to become someone she is not, ← ④ conclusion sentence
simply to please her mother.

③ supporting sentences