

Composition

Second Year

Second Semester

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Brush up on your Essay Writing Skills!

An essay is a group of paragraphs that develops one central idea. Each of the paragraphs in an essay has a designated function:

1. **Introduction.** The introduction is usually one paragraph that introduces the topic to be discussed and the central idea (the thesis statement) of the essay.
2. **Developmental Paragraphs.** These paragraphs develop various aspects of the topic and the central idea. They may discuss causes, effects, reasons, examples, process, classifications, or points of comparison and contrast. They may also describe or narrate.
3. **Conclusion.** This paragraph concludes the thought developed in the essay. It is the closing word.

How many paragraphs an essay contains depends entirely on the complexity of the topic; some essays have two or three paragraphs, while others may have twenty. However, for most purposes, the essays written by college students contain from four to six paragraphs, with the most common number being five: one introductory paragraph, three developmental paragraphs, and one concluding paragraph.

The Thesis Statement

1. It should be expressed in a complete sentence.

Not a thesis statement: My fear of the dark.

Thesis statement: My fear of the dark has made my life miserable.

2. It expresses an opinion, attitude, or idea, not simply announces the topic

Not a thesis statement: I'm going to discuss the effects of radiation.

Thesis statement: The effects of radiation are often unpredictable.

3. It should express an opinion; it should not express a fact.

Not a thesis statement: Cows produce milk.

Thesis statement: The milk cows produce is not always fit for human consumption.

Not a thesis statement: There are advantages and disadvantages to homeschooling.

Thesis statement: The advantages to homeschooling far outweigh the disadvantages.

4. It should express only one idea toward one topic; if a thesis statement contains two or more ideas, the essay runs the risk of lacking unity and coherence.

Not a thesis statement: Going to college in the Midwest can be fun, and I have found that living in a suburb of a large city is the best way to live while at college.

Thesis statement: Going to college in the Midwest can be fun.

Exercise 1

Study the following statements carefully. If the statement is a thesis statement, write YES in the blank; if it is not a thesis statement, write NO.

1. _____ The advantages of majoring in engineering.
2. _____ I would like to discuss my views on the Olympic Games.
3. _____ Students should be allowed to manage the bookstore.
4. _____ My vacation in San Francisco was a lot of fun, and I liked visiting the wine country in California, too.
5. _____ Why do I want to be a lawyer?
6. _____ The differences between Mandarin and Hunan cuisine.
7. _____ You can find some of the most colorful people on the bus.
8. _____ Being honest is important.
9. _____ I am going to describe my home.
10. _____ There are many similarities and differences between Boston and Seattle.

Exercise 2

Study the following statements, which are not thesis statements. Try to rewrite each of the sentences to make it a thesis statement.

1. I am going to explain why I decided to go to college.

2. The hazards of storing chemical wastes.

3. There are many similarities and differences between life in the country and life in the city.

4. New York City is the largest city in the United States.

5. Smoking can be hazardous to a person's health, and it is also very unpleasant to watch someone smoking.

6. Personal electronics that are popular with students is the subject of this essay.

7. In this essay, I will write about the negative effects of smoking.

8. In March 2009, there was a devastating earthquake in Singapore.

9. Men and women have been very different.

The Introduction

1. It should introduce the topic.

The introductory paragraph is the first thing that a reader sees, so this paragraph should inform the reader of the topic being discussed.

2. It should indicate generally how the topic is to be developed.

A good introductory paragraph should indicate whether the essay is going to discuss causes, effects, reasons, or examples; whether the essay is going to classify, describe, narrate, or explain a process.

3. It contains the thesis statement.

For class essays, it is a good idea to state the thesis clearly in the introduction.

4. It should be inviting; it should be interesting enough to make the reader want to continue reading.

Therefore, it makes good sense not to put the thesis statement in the right at the beginning of the introductory paragraph. Not only should you introduce the topic before you state an opinion about it (the thesis statement), but you should try to entice the reader to continue after reading the first sentence. Stating an opinion about something in the first sentence is not usually very inviting; in fact, if the reader disagrees with the opinion, it may very well discourage him or her from reading your essay.

Since the introduction is the first paragraph the reader reads, it is often the first paragraph the student plans and can be, therefore, the most difficult. There are many ways to begin an essay. Four basic types of introductions are the "Turnabout," which starts with the opposite idea and moves to the author's actual thesis; the "Dramatic Entrance," which starts with a narrative, description, or dramatic example related to the topic; the "Relevant Quotation," which uses a quote pertinent to the topic; and the "Funnel," which progresses from the general to the specific. (You will see examples of these four types when we discuss the types of essays). You can also start an introductory paragraph with a question or a definition of a word or phrase.

Exercise 3:

Study the following introductory paragraphs. Underline the thesis statement. Evaluate these introductory paragraphs.

1. We are all familiar with the image of the fat, jolly person, right? Unfortunately this is an inaccurate stereotype. Fat people are not always so happy.

2. We live in an era where television is the national pastime. Since the invention of the television set, people have been spending more of their free time watching television than doing anything else. Many of the television addicts feel that this particular pastime is not a bad one; indeed, they argue that people can learn a great deal watching television of course, if you look long and hard enough, you can probably find some programs that are educationally motivating. But, for the most part, watching television is a waste of time.

3. Last year, my cousin, Julio, went to a bank to apply for a job. As you know, when you apply for a job, you must be ready to answer a lot of ambiguous questions. Some of the questions that an interviewer may ask you include: educational background, previous jobs, and salaries you earned. The problem with Julio was that he wasn't prepared for the questions. The interviewer asked Julio a lot of things that he couldn't answer. Because Julio wasn't prepared for the interview, he didn't get the job. If you don't want to be in that situation, you should follow these steps.

The developmental Paragraphs

1. Each discusses one aspect of the main topic.

If, for example, you were asked to write about the effects of smoking on a person's health, each paragraph should discuss only one effect.

2. The controlling idea in the developmental paragraph should echo the central idea in the thesis statement.

If, for example, your thesis statement about the effects of smoking is "Smoking is a destructive habit," the controlling idea in each paragraph should have something to do with the destructiveness of the effects.

3. *The developmental paragraphs should have coherence and unity.*

The order of your paragraphs should not be random. Just as your sentences need to flow smoothly, the train of thought at the end of one paragraph should be picked up at the beginning of the next paragraph; this can be achieved through the use of transitions.

After you have decided on your thesis, you need to break the thesis down logically into topics for your paragraphs. There are several principles for logically breaking down your thesis. This depends on your thesis statement.

The Conclusion

1. *It can restate the main points discussed.*

This restatement should be brief; you have already discussed them in length.

2. *It can restate the thesis.*

Generally, to avoid sounding repetitious, it is good to restate the thesis in different words. The restatement of the thesis is really a reassertion of its importance or validity.

3. *It should not bring up a new topic.*

In this semester, we will focus on three types of essays: the comparison and contrast essay, the process essay, and the cause and effect essay.

Thank you