



Essay Structure

The construction of an essay is one of the basic skills that each student needs to know.

An essay is a short piece of writing that discusses, describes or analyzes **one topic**. It can range in **length from one paragraph to more than twenty**. It can be about anything, and be written in almost any style. It can be serious or funny, straight-forward or symbolic. It can describe personal opinions, or just report information. An essay can be written from any perspective, but essays are most commonly written in the first person (*I*), or third person.

An essay can have many purposes, but the basic structure is the same no matter what. Any essay should have a beginning, middle and end. An essay should also have an appropriate title.

Title: Choosing a title is not always easy. Here are some ideas:

- **Relate the title to the topic** – The title should let the reader know what the essay is going to be about. Using "Easy" titles, i.e. using a book title or exact wording from the assignment as a title adds no value to the essay.
- **Interest the reader** - The title should draw the reader into the essay by raising questions or sparking interest. Be clear and concise (*stručný*) in choosing your title.
- **Put off choosing the title** - It is often much easier to title an essay after it is completely written. Many titles come from lines from within the essay.
- **Forget Grammar** - In titles, all important words are capitalized. You need not have a complete sentence.

Introduction/Introductory paragraph: The introduction to an essay serves two basic purposes: to let the reader know what thesis will be discussed and to interest the readers and keep them engaged with the essay. The Introductory Paragraph is generally the part where the writer should present the purpose of writing and talk about the background of the topic. It is also here that the *thesis statement* (a kind of outline for the paper which tells the reader what the essay is about) will probably be explained/described. The last sentence of this paragraph should contain a *transitional "hook"* which moves the reader to the first paragraph of the body of the essay. The introduction and conclusion should correspond, without being repetitive.

One of the most common mistakes writers make is to give too much information in the introduction. The key is keeping it simple by letting the reader know what will be discussed. Here are some ideas:

- **State the thesis** - This is the simplest way to reveal the thesis of an essay. State the thesis and follow up with a list of the major points you will use to support your thesis.
- **Pose a question** - Posing a question can be an effective way of presenting a thesis; the use of questions can command the reader's attention. One popular format for an essay is the "Question and Answer" format, in which the writer introduces the thesis in the form of a "yes or no" question and uses the body of the essay to answer this question.
- **Give facts** - A plainly-stated, interesting/unexpected fact can effectively grab the reader's interest. Don't forget to connect the fact to your thesis.
- **Use a quote** - A well-known / interesting quote that relates to the thesis offers a recognizable entry-point to the introduction and allows the reader to feel a sense of connection to the essay.

Body: The body should follow a form that reflects its purpose, for example, if the argument is supported by 3 main ideas, there will probably be three identifiable sections in the body of the essay. This is the part where all the discussions will be presented.

The number of body paragraphs depends on the goal of writing and the sub discussions that the writer wishes to include. For example an analysis essay about a book may be discussed in 3 paragraphs (character analysis, plot analysis, setting analysis).

1st paragraph: This paragraph should contain the strongest argument, most significant example, cleverest illustration, or an obvious starting point. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph.

2nd paragraph: This paragraph should contain the second strongest argument, second most significant example, second cleverest illustration, or an obvious follow up to the first paragraph in the body. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph.

3rd paragraph: This paragraph should contain the weakest argument, weakest example, weakest illustration, or an obvious follow up to the second paragraph in the body. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. This paragraph should include a transitional concluding hook that signals the reader that this is the final major point being made in this paper. This hook also leads into the last, or concluding, paragraph.

The 1st sentence of each paragraph should include the reverse hook which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the previous paragraph. *The last sentence in each paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the next paragraph of the body.*

Conclusions: Generally, a conclusion should summarise the arguments and emphasise any deductions or conclusions that have been drawn in the body of the text. A conclusion is a chance to wrap up an essay, leaving the reader to think about the information presented. It needs to be confident, reinforcing the thesis developed and supported throughout the essay. The way the writer approaches the conclusion will depend upon the essay format. The introduction and conclusion should correspond, without being repetitive.

Types of Essay

There are many different kinds of essays. The following are some of the most common ones:

A descriptive essay provides details about how something looks, feels, tastes, smells, makes one feel, or sounds. It can also describe what something is, or how something happened. These essays generally use a lot of sensory details. The essay could be a list-like description that provides point by point details. Or, it could function as a story, keeping the reader interested in the plot and theme of the event described. It could describe e.g. **a tree in your backyard; a visit to a hospital; a potato salad.**

A definition essay attempts to define a specific term. It could try to pin down the meaning of a specific word, or define an abstract concept. The analysis goes deeper than a simple dictionary definition; it should attempt to explain *why* the term is defined as such. It could define e.g. **the meaning and importance of love / family / honesty.**

A compare/contrast essay discusses the similarities and differences between two things, people, concepts, places, etc. The essay could be an unbiased discussion, or an attempt to convince the reader of the benefits of one thing, person, or concept. The essay could discuss both similarities and differences, or it could just focus on one or the other. A **comparison essay** usually discusses the similarities between two things, while the **contrast essay** discusses the differences. It may discuss e.g. **the likenesses and differences between two places, the similarities and differences between two people.**

A narrative essay tells a story. It can also be called a "short story." Generally the narrative essay is conversational in style, and tells of a personal experience. It is most commonly written in the first person. It could tell of e.g. **your fishing trips; a boring trip to the grocery store; your near-death experience.**

An argumentative essay attempts to persuade the reader to the writer's point of view. The writer can either be serious or funny, but always tries to convince the reader of the validity of his or her opinion. It may persuade a reader that e.g. **he or she should use public transportation instead of driving; cats are better than dogs.**

A cause/effect essay explains why or how some event happened, and what resulted from the event. The essay could discuss both **causes and effects**, or it could simply address one or the other. A **cause essay** usually discusses the reasons why something happened. An **effect essay** discusses what happens after a specific event or circumstance. It may explain e.g. **why a volcano erupts, and what happens afterwards.**

Other types of essays: a process essay; a critical essay

TASK 1

Read the following extract.

"The fire caused many terrible things to happen; it destroyed homes and forests and polluted the atmosphere."

The extract shows:

- A) A cause essay
- B) An effect essay
- C) An argumentative essay

TASK 2

Imagine that you were asked to write an argumentative essay. In your essay, you should persuade the readers that **PET X** is better than **PET Y**. The title could be, for example, **Cats are Better Than Dogs** or **Turtles are Better Than Parrots**.

- Make a list of all the arguments you can think of regarding your topic. Choose 1 – 3 argument(s) on which you can elaborate. Write a paragraph on each.

Answer: B