

# THE STRUCTURE OF AN ESSAY

A literary essay consists of **four main parts**:

**Title**

**Introduction**

**Body Paragraphs**

**Conclusion**

**TITLE:** Provide a succinct statement of the thesis.

**INTRODUCTION:** Contains a lead, plan of development and thesis.

## LEAD

A lead, the first part of the introduction, may consist of 2 or 3 general statements related to your topic. These sentences should not mention the title of the novel, play or poem being discussed, nor should they name the author, or any of the characters in the work. The purpose of these sentences is to capture the reader's interest and gently lead him into your opinion statement.

*How does one create a lead?*

1. Write out your thesis statement.
2. Underline all of the nouns in your thesis statement.
3. Compose general statements about one or more of those nouns.

## PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

A **plan of development** consists of 1 or 2 sentences which *briefly* mention the proofs you will elaborate in your essay. If you are using terms that you think may be unfamiliar to your reader, you should define them.

*How does one create a plan of development?*

1. Decide on and list the proofs that you will be using to support your thesis.
2. Condense these proofs into short phrases which give concise information.
3. Write out a parallel sentence which includes these phrases.

EXAMPLES:

The antagonist lacks courage, honesty and imagination. (all nouns)

OR

The antagonist is courageous, honest and imaginative. (all adjectives)

*“Do nots” in creating a plan of development:*

Do not explain too much. (This is the purpose of the body paragraphs; if you give too much information about your proofs in the introduction, you will run out of things to say in the body and will ultimately become repetitious)

### **THESIS:**

A **thesis**, the most important part of the introduction, is your opinion reduced into one arguable statement. A thesis is that which you are going to prove in the body of your essay.

*How does one develop a thesis? Suggestion.*

1. Read the essay question carefully and clarify what it is you are being asked to prove.
2. Usually the thesis is inherent in the question.

### **THE BODY:**

The body of an essay consists of separate paragraphs, each one using proofs from the literature to support the argument/thesis. Each body paragraph can be divided into 3 sections: **topic sentence, explanation and proof, and summary statement(s).**

#### **TOPIC SENTENCE**

A topic sentence, usually the first sentence in each body paragraph, introduces what you will be discussing in that paragraph. It should not be too *broad* or too *specific*.

#### **EXPLANATION AND PROOF**

The sentence and/or quotations which follow the topic sentence are called the explanation proofs. They prove that your thesis is true and correct. Direct and indirect quotations may be used. A sentence or two must lead into or introduce your quotation. You must also draw conclusions related to your thesis from the quotation which must be properly footnoted.

#### **SUMMARY STATEMENT**

A sentence or two which concludes the point you are making in the paragraph is the final part of each body paragraph.

#### **USEFUL INFORMATION FOR BODY PARAGRAPHS:**

### ***Transitional Phrases:***

Use a transitional device in your topic sentence to smoothly move from one sentence/body paragraph to the next.

EXAMPLE: *In addition to courage, Romeo clearly demonstrates his honesty.*

- a) moreover, further, furthermore, similarly
- b) nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary
- c) then, at present, eventually, meanwhile
- d) next, to begin with, in conclusion
- e) for instance, for example
- f) for this reason, it follows that

*How does one create good body paragraphs? Suggestions:*

- a) First, find proof from the literary work which *strongly* supports your thesis.
- b) Organize the proofs into distinct categories.
- c) Write a concise topic sentence for each of these categories. If ideas in topic sentences overlap, you will have *structural problems* in the essay.
- d) *Introduce* your quotation with a clear explanation of the circumstances surrounding the quotation sentence.
- e) Following your quotation *draw a conclusion* relating to your topic sentence.
- f) Paraphrase or copy out the quotation *word for word* from the text.
- g) Be courteous to your readers. Keep them tuned in and focused.

*“Do nots” in creating body paragraphs:*

- a) Do not begin or end a body paragraph with a quotation.
- b) Do not use an excessive number of quotations
- c) Do not fail to explain the quotation

### **CONCLUSION:**

The conclusion of an essay also consists of 3 distinct parts: the thesis creatively restated, the proofs summarized, and a general closing statement.

#### **THESIS RESTATED**

One sentence, the first in the conclusion, imaginatively restates your thesis.

## **PROOFS SUMMARIZED**

Provide one or two brief sentences restating the proofs used in the body of the essay.

## **GENERAL STATEMENT**

The last part of the conclusion, made up of one or more statements related to the topic, is called the general statement.

*“Do nots” in creating a conclusion? Suggestions:*

- a) Do not use any quotation from the literary work in a conclusion.
- b) Do not repeat the explanation of your proofs – merely mention them.
- c) Do not introduce new information or give your personal opinion of the book in general closing statements.
- d) Do not use phrases such as , *This essay proves...or in the preceding paragraphs, it was shown...or In conclusion.*

## **General Information:**

- a) Never use first or second person in a formal essay: I, me ,us, we, you, yours, yourself, my, our(s), mine yourselves, myself, ourselves, etc.
- b) Do use third person: he, she, it, one, they, them, their, themselves, etc.
- c) Maintain verb tense. Simple present is usually used. Avoid tense-shifts within in the same sentence.
- d) Do not use abbreviations. Etc. = et cetera; i.e. = that is
- e) Do not use symbols: =+ and
- f) Do not use numerals unless in an address, or a date.
- g) Do not use only the first name of the author. Use first and last name. William Shakespeare or just Shakespeare.

Ideas for this document have been taken from:

Payne, Lucille *The Lively Art of Writing* Chicago: Follett Publishing, 1975

**MYTH:** All essays MUST have 5 paragraphs

**FACTS:** The number of body paragraphs will vary with the amount of researched information and categories/topic sentences. There could be as few as 3 body paragraphs and as many as 100+.

All essays MUST have an introduction and a conclusion.