

Basic Essay Structure

The structure described below will work for a writing assignment you face in any college course, unless, of course, your instructor specifically indicates a different format.

I. **Introduction** (usually one paragraph)

- A. Attention-getting opener: anecdote, question, quote, analogy, definition, example.
- B. Narrowing of general topic
- C. Thesis:
 - 1. States specific topic, purpose (to inform or to persuade), and focus (your particular point or angle about topic)
 - 2. Should NOT announce obviously (“In this paper I will”)
 - 3. Should usually be last sentence of introduction paragraph
 - 4. Can (but doesn’t have to!) list three (or more) subtopics to be discussed, but if so, you must follow that order in body paragraphs

II. **Body** (includes a minimum of three paragraphs, but usually has more)

- A. Topic sentence: states main idea of paragraph; makes clear what major point paragraph will discuss
- B. Support:
 - 1. Reasons/Explanations: you need to provide the thinking behind any claims made, showing how one arrived at that conclusion
 - 2. Specific Detail: use real names, dates, numbers and sense descriptions (how things taste, feel, smell, look, and/or sound)
 - a. Too general: “I had a teacher in high school who always did fun things to keep us interested in what he was teaching, which helped us learn the material better.”
 - b. Good detail: “My high school algebra teacher, Mr. Coombs, would play a version of “Jeopardy” with us in which the students would break into teams to try to beat each other to the answers to equations. He gave us five extra credit points on the midterm if we won, which made us try harder; I really learned how to do the FOIL method by playing in those games.”
 - 3. Real-life examples: use your life experiences to illustrate claims you make and how you arrived at them
 - 4. Climactic order: in an analysis/argument, your best idea should be discussed in your last body paragraph

III. **Conclusion** (usually one paragraph)

- A. Reaffirm thesis: don’t use exact same sentence as thesis, but remind reader of main idea
- B. Finish with broad point or generalization, suggestion for the reader, prediction for the future, rhetorical question, etc.
- C. Don’t bring up new ideas/analyses/points regarding your thesis in conclusion; all support should stay in body of essay