

# Introductions, Body Paragraphs, and Conclusions for an Argument Paper

The following sections outline the generally accepted structure for an academic argument paper. Keep in mind that these are guidelines and that your structure needs to be flexible enough to meet the requirements of your purpose and audience.

## Introduction

The introduction is the broad beginning of the paper that answers three important questions:

1. What is this?
2. Why am I reading it?
3. What do you want me to do?

You should answer these questions by doing the following:

1. Set the context –provide general information about the main idea, explaining the situation so the reader can make sense of the topic and the claims you make and support
2. State why the main idea is important –tell the reader why he or she should care and keep reading. Your goal is to create a compelling, clear, and convincing essay people will want to read and act upon
3. State your thesis/claim –compose a sentence or two stating the position you will support with logos (sound reasoning: induction, deduction), pathos (balanced emotional appeal), and ethos (author credibility).

For exploratory essays, your primary research question would replace your thesis statement so that the audience understands why you began your inquiry. An overview of the types of sources you explored might follow your research question.

If your argument paper is long, you may want to forecast how you will support your thesis by outlining the structure of your paper, the sources you will consider, and the opposition to your position. You can forecast your paper in many different ways depending on the type of paper you are writing. Your forecast could read something like this:

*First, I will define key terms for my argument, and then I will provide some background of the situation. Next I will outline the important positions of the argument and explain why I support one of these positions. Lastly, I will consider opposing positions and discuss why these positions are outdated. I will conclude with some ideas for taking action and possible directions for future research.*

When writing a research paper, you may need to use a more formal, less personal tone. Your forecast might read like this:

*This paper begins by providing key terms for the argument before providing background of the situation. Next, important positions are outlined and supported. To provide a more thorough explanation of these important positions, opposing positions are discussed. The paper concludes with some ideas for taking action and possible directions for future research.*

These are very general examples, but by adding some details on your specific topic, a forecast will effectively outline the structure of your paper so your readers can more easily follow your ideas.

## Thesis checklist

Your thesis is more than a general statement about your main idea. It needs to establish a clear position you will support with balanced proofs (logos, pathos, ethos). Use the checklist below to help you create a thesis.

This section is adapted from *Writing with a Thesis: A Rhetoric Reader* by David Skwire and Sarah Skwire:

Make sure you avoid the following when creating your thesis:

- A thesis is not a title: Homes and schools (title) vs. Parents ought to participate more in the education of their children (good thesis).
- A thesis is not an announcement of the subject: My subject is the incompetence of the Supreme Court vs. The Supreme Court made a mistake when it ruled in favor of George W. Bush in the 2000 election.
- A thesis is not a statement of absolute fact: Jane Austen is the author of *Pride and Prejudice*.
- A thesis is not the whole essay: A thesis is your main idea/claim/refutation/problem-solution expressed in a single sentence or a combination of sentences.
- *Please note that according to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition, "A thesis statement is a single sentence that formulates both your topic and your point of view" (Gibaldi 42). However, if your paper is more complex and requires a thesis statement, your thesis may require a combination of sentences.*

Make sure you follow these guidelines when creating your thesis:

- A good thesis is unified:
  - NOT: Detective stories are not a high form of literature, but people have always been fascinated by them, and many fine writers have experimented with them (floppy). vs.
  - BETTER: Detective stories appeal to the basic human desire for thrills (concise).
- A good thesis is specific:
  - NOT: James Joyce's *Ulysses* is very good. vs.
  - BETTER: James Joyce's *Ulysses* helped create a new way for writers to deal with the unconscious.
- Try to be as specific as possible (without providing too much detail) when creating your thesis:
  - NOT: James Joyce's *Ulysses* helped create a new way for writers to deal with the unconscious. vs.
  - BETTER: James Joyce's *Ulysses* helped create a new way for writers to deal with the unconscious by utilizing the findings of Freudian psychology and introducing the techniques of literary stream-of-consciousness.

Quick Checklist:

\_\_\_\_\_ The thesis/claim follows the guidelines outlined above

\_\_\_\_\_ The thesis/claim matches the requirements and goals of the assignment

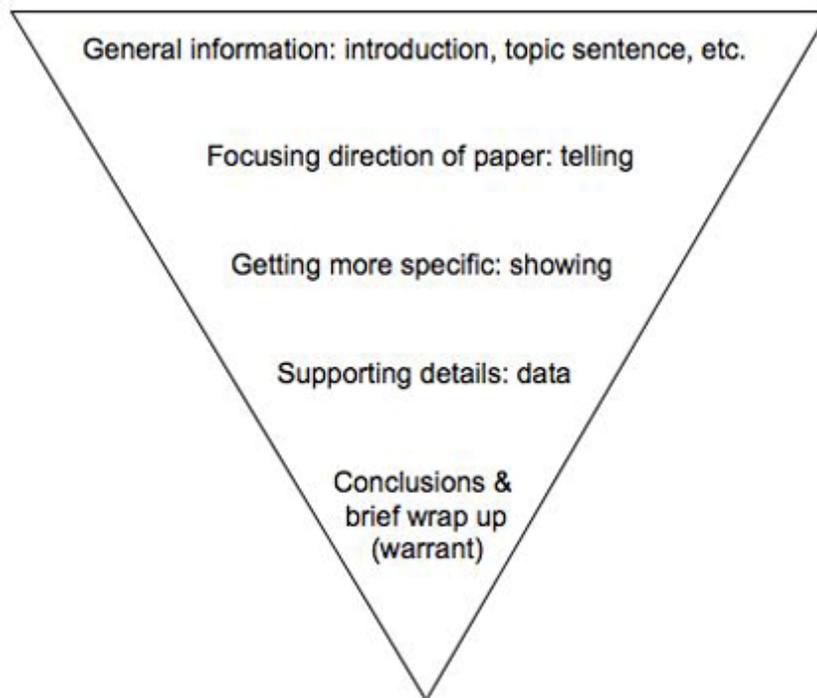
\_\_\_\_\_ The thesis/claim is clear and easily recognizable

\_\_\_\_\_ The thesis/claim seems supportable by good reasoning/data, emotional appeal

# Body Paragraphs

## Body paragraphs: Moving from general to specific information

Your paper should be organized in a manner that moves from general to specific information. Every time you begin a new subject, think of an inverted pyramid - The broadest range of information sits at the top, and as the paragraph or paper progresses, the author becomes more and more focused on the argument ending with specific, detailed evidence supporting a claim. Lastly, the author explains how and why the information she has just provided connects to and supports her thesis (a brief wrap up or warrant).



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Image Caption: Moving from General to Specific Information

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### The four elements of a good paragraph (TTEB)

A good paragraph should contain at least the following four elements: **T**ransition, **T**opic sentence, specific **E**vidence and analysis, and a **B**rief wrap-up sentence (also known as a *warrant*) –TTEB!

1. A **T**ransition sentence leading in from a previous paragraph to assure smooth reading. This acts as a hand off from one idea to the next.
2. A **T**opic sentence that tells the reader what you will be discussing in the paragraph.
3. Specific **E**vidence and analysis that supports one of your claims and that provides a deeper level of detail than your topic sentence.
4. A **B**rief wrap-up sentence that tells the reader how and why this information supports the paper's thesis. The brief wrap-up is also known as the warrant. The warrant is important to your argument because it connects your reasoning and support to your thesis, and it shows that the information in the paragraph is related to your thesis and helps defend it.

## Supporting evidence (induction and deduction)

### Induction

Induction is the type of reasoning that moves from specific facts to a general conclusion. When you use induction in your paper, you will state your thesis (which is actually the conclusion you have come to after looking at all the facts) and then support your thesis with the facts. The following is an example of induction taken from Dorothy U. Seyler's *Understanding Argument*

Facts:

There is the dead body of Smith. Smith was shot in his bedroom between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m., according to the coroner. Smith was shot with a .32 caliber pistol. The pistol left in the bedroom contains Jones's fingerprints. Jones was seen, by a neighbor, entering the Smith home at around 11:00 p.m. the night of Smith's death. A coworker heard Smith and Jones arguing in Smith's office the morning of the day Smith died.

Conclusion: Jones killed Smith.

Here, then, is the example in bullet form:

- Conclusion: Jones killed Smith
- Support: Smith was shot by Jones' gun, Jones was seen entering the scene of the crime, Jones and Smith argued earlier in the day Smith died.
- Assumption: The facts are representative, not isolated incidents, and thus reveal a trend, justifying the conclusion drawn.

### Deduction

When you use deduction in an argument, you begin with general premises and move to a specific conclusion. There is a precise pattern you must use when you reason deductively. This pattern is called syllogistic reasoning (the syllogism). Syllogistic reasoning (deduction) is organized in three steps:

1. Major premise
2. Minor premise
3. Conclusion

In order for the syllogism (deduction) to work, you must accept that the relationship of the two premises lead, logically, to the conclusion. Here are two examples of deduction or syllogistic reasoning:

Socrates

1. Major premise: All men are mortal.
2. Minor premise: Socrates is a man.
3. Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

Lincoln

1. Major premise: People who perform with courage and clear purpose in a crisis are great leaders.
2. Minor premise: Lincoln was a person who performed with courage and a clear purpose in a crisis.
3. Conclusion: Lincoln was a great leader.

So in order for deduction to work in the example involving Socrates, you must agree that (1) all men are mortal (they all die); and (2) Socrates is a man. If you disagree with either of these premises, the conclusion is invalid. The example using Socrates isn't so difficult to validate. But when you move into more murky water (when you use terms such as *courage*, *clear purpose*, and *great*), the connections get tenuous.

For example, some historians might argue that Lincoln didn't really shine until a few years into the Civil War, after many Union losses to Southern leaders such as Robert E. Lee.

The following is a clear example of deduction gone awry:

1. *Major premise: All dogs make good pets.*
2. *Minor premise: Doogle is a dog.*
3. *Conclusion: Doogle will make a good pet.*

If you don't agree that all dogs make good pets, then the conclusion that Doogle will make a good pet is invalid.

Enthymemes

When a premise in a syllogism is missing, the syllogism becomes an enthymeme. Enthymemes can be very effective in argument, but they can also be unethical and lead to invalid conclusions. Authors often use enthymemes to persuade audiences. The following is an example of an enthymeme:

*If you have a plasma TV, you are not poor.*

The first part of the enthymeme (If you have a plasma TV) is the stated premise. The second part of the statement (you are not poor) is the conclusion. So the unstated premise is "Only rich people have plasma TVs." The enthymeme above leads us to an invalid conclusion (people who own plasma TVs are not poor) because there are plenty of people who own plasma TVs who are poor. Let's look at this enthymeme in a syllogistic structure:

- Major premise: People who own plasma TVs are rich (unstated above).
- Minor premise: You own a plasma TV.
- Conclusion: You are not poor.

To help you understand how induction and deduction can work together to form a solid argument, you may want to look at the United States Declaration of Independence. The first section of the Declaration contains a series of syllogisms, while the middle section is an inductive list of examples. The final section brings the first and second sections together in a compelling conclusion.

## Rebuttal Sections

In order to present a fair and convincing message, you may need to anticipate, research, and outline some of the common positions (arguments) that dispute your thesis. If the situation (purpose) calls for you to do this, you will present and then refute these other positions in the rebuttal section of your essay.

It is important to consider other positions because in most cases, your primary audience will be fence-sitters. Fence-sitters are people who have not decided which side of the argument to support.

People who are on your side of the argument will not need a lot of information to align with your position. People who are completely against your argument—perhaps for ethical or religious reasons—will probably never align with your position no matter how much information you provide.

Therefore, the audience you should consider most important are those people who haven't decided which side of the argument they will support—the fence-sitters.

In many cases, these fence-sitters have not decided which side to align with because they see value in both positions. Therefore, to not consider opposing positions to your own in a fair manner may alienate fence-sitters when they see that you are not addressing their concerns or discussion opposing positions at all.

## Organizing your rebuttal section

Following the TTEB method outlined in the Body Paragraph section, forecast all the information that will follow in the rebuttal section and then move point by point through the other positions addressing each one as you go. The outline below, adapted from Seyler's *Understanding Argument*, is an example of a rebuttal section from a thesis essay.

When you rebut or refute an opposing position, use the following three-part organization:

**The opponent's argument:** Usually, you should not assume that your reader has read or remembered the argument you are refuting. Thus at the beginning of your paragraph, you need to state, accurately and fairly, the main points of the argument you will refute.

**Your position:** Next, make clear the nature of your disagreement with the argument or position you are refuting. Your position might assert, for example, that a writer has not proved his assertion because he has provided evidence that is outdated, or that the argument is filled with fallacies.

**Your refutation:** The specifics of your counterargument will depend upon the nature of your disagreement. If you challenge the writer's evidence, then you must present the more recent evidence. If you challenge assumptions, then you must explain why they do not hold up. If your position is that the piece is filled with fallacies, then you must present and explain each fallacy.

## Conclusions

Conclusions wrap up what you have been discussing in your paper. After moving from general to specific information in the introduction and body paragraphs, your conclusion should begin pulling back into more general information that restates the main points of your argument. Conclusions may also call for action or overview future possible research. The following outline may help you conclude your paper:

In a general way,

- Restate your topic and why it is important,
- Restate your thesis/claim,
- Address opposing viewpoints and explain why readers should align with your position,
- Call for action or overview future research possibilities.

Remember that once you accomplish these tasks, unless otherwise directed by your instructor, you are finished. Done. Complete. Don't try to bring in new points or end with a whiz bang(!) conclusion or try to solve world hunger in the final sentence of your conclusion. Simplicity is best for a clear, convincing message.

The preacher's maxim is one of the most effective formulas to follow for argument papers:

1. Tell what you're going to tell them (introduction).
2. Tell them (body).
3. Tell them what you told them (conclusion).