

The Five Paragraph Essay

State exactly what you're going to say in your first sentence. Explain how you're going to prove it in your first paragraph. Get it done simply and easily in the body paragraphs. Sum it all up in the conclusion, just in case the reader forgot what you were trying to say in the first place. Essay writing is easy, once you understand that it is different from creative writing. Follow this simple plan:

The Introduction (paragraph one)

(Your topic sentence tells the reader exactly what you plan to prove.) I like ice cream. (Okay. That's easy. We can't be confused by that. If you said, "The French Revolution had many causes" or "American Motors has many great new cars this year" we would also know exactly what your paper was about. Now, how are you going to attack this issue? What subtopics are you going to use?) It has many different flavours. (Good. You can develop that idea.) It reminds me of my youth. (That should be fun.) Ice cream cools me off on hot days. (That's three good subtopics which can easily be developed, but you are not done, because you need to tie the whole paragraph off with a conclusion, just in case the reader isn't following your plan.) I really enjoy ice cream.

Now, let's look at the whole introductory paragraph:

I like ice cream. It has many different flavours. It reminds me of my youth. Ice cream cools me off on hot days. I really enjoy ice cream.

The Body (paragraphs two, three, and four)

The most difficult part of the composition is finished. You have told the reader exactly what your paper is about and you have laid out a plan of attack for the reader to follow. The rest of the composition is just filling out the details. For the topic sentence of your second paragraph, you simply look at the second sentence of your introduction: (Ice cream has many different flavours.) You can copy your third sentence as the topic sentence of your third paragraph, and your fourth in the same way. It is then a simple matter to fill in three specific examples in each paragraph to clarify your ideas.

The body of the essay, then, should look something like this:

Ice cream has many different flavours. Chocolate is one of my favourites because it is very sweet and I love sweet things. Rocky Road is yet another great flavour. The nuts add a terrific chewiness to the sweet chocolate. A third great flavour is Superman ice cream which mixes all the colors of Superman's costume into a pretty, tutti-frutti mixture that looks as good as it tastes. These are just a few of the many terrific flavours I like in ice cream.

Ice cream reminds me of my youth. Every time I have an ice cream cone I remember the fun I had when I was 14 and I spilled my cone down Margaret

Miller's bathing suit. Everyone laughed when she ran screaming down the beach. Ice cream sundaes remind me of the many great times we had at Jahn's when I was younger, ordering huge concoctions called, "Kitchen sinks." Just hearing the sound of the ice cream man's truck brings back good memories of all the times we used to sit under the tree on my lawn waiting for the Good Humor man. Even my dog used to get a Dixie cup once in awhile. Ice cream today always brings back great memories.

Ice cream is a great way to cool off. Once, when it was 110 degrees in the shade, I had a vanilla thick shake and felt very cool. Another time, it was so hot, we got cool just standing around the ice cream truck and enjoying the cool breeze. Last week, the beach was so hot I was burning my feet in the sand. I got some ice cream and put a little on my feet to soothe the heat. Whenever I've needed cooling down, I have always turned to ice cream.

The Conclusion (paragraph five)

You've varied the wording, added specific details, and made sure to conclude each sentence with a general remark that rephrased your topic sentence. You turn now to your last paragraph which sums up all your arguments and basically restates your introduction:

I have many reasons for loving ice cream. It is a great cooler downer. It brings back many fun memories of my childhood. It comes in all kinds of great flavours. When I scream, it's for ice cream!

The arguments have been restated in reverse order. This is especially good for more sophisticated essays in which one has put arguments in order, with the strongest argument at the end.

This example is rather simplistic, as it was written by a junior high student, but it illustrates perfectly the basic five paragraph essay.

INTRODUCTIONS

1. "clincher" statement that catches the reader's attention
2. overview of what you plan on discussing in your essay.
3. thesis statement - state your position
4. transitions smoothly into first paragraph

THESIS STATEMENT

1. **main idea** of your entire paper
2. expresses your position in a full, declarative sentence
3. controls the focus of the entire paper
4. points forward to the conclusion
5. conforms to your reasons, examples, and evidence

Examples of a thesis statement

Opinion and Fact : Dracula was one of the better films this summer because of its setting, action, and philosophy.

Consequence : Social ostracism, great expense, and personal hardship are three of the unfortunate results of the most dangerous disease of the century - AIDS.

Autobiographical : From my personal experience, I know that poor preparation, alcohol consumption, and insect infestation can cause most family picnics to fail.

AVOIDING MISTAKES IN THE INTRODUCTION

- avoid a purpose statement, such as "The purpose of this..." or "Now I shall prove" or "in this paragraph I will tell you"
- avoid repetition of the title
- avoid complex or difficult questions that may puzzle your reader
- avoid artwork or cute lettering

A BEAUTIFUL BODY PARAGRAPH

- A body paragraph is a group of sentences that presents and develops **one main idea** about a topic. These sentences work together to communicate one main idea.
- The main idea is the overall point of the paragraph that is conveyed in the topic sentence.
- The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph that states the main idea stated in each part of the thesis. This sentence controls the entire paragraph. It tells the reader what the rest of the paragraph is about. This helps the writer focus on the main idea and not stray from the main idea. This is more general than the supporting details that follow.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Restate the thesis
2. Go beyond the thesis by stating something worthwhile:
 - reach a judgment
 - endorse an issue
 - discuss findings
 - offer directives
3. Leave the reader with a thought provoking statement

AVOIDING MISTAKES IN YOUR CONCLUSION

- avoid presenting new ideas
- avoid stopping at an awkward spot or trailing off into meaningless or irrelevant information
- avoid questions that raise new issues
- avoid getting "preachy" - telling the reader that he/she should do or think something
- avoid fancy artwork or cute lettering



The essay below demonstrates the principles of writing a basic essay. The different parts of the essay have been labelled. The thesis statement is in bold, the topic sentences are in italics, and each main point is underlined. When you write your own essay, of course, you will not need to mark these parts of the essay unless your teacher has asked you to do so. They are marked here just so that you can more easily identify them.

"A dog is man's best friend." That common saying may contain some truth, but dogs are not the only animal friend whose companionship people enjoy. For many people, a cat is their best friend. **Despite what dog lovers may believe, cats make excellent housepets.**

In the first place, people enjoy the companionship of cats. Many cats are affectionate. They will snuggle up and ask to be petted, or scratched under the chin. Who can resist a purring cat? If they're not feeling affectionate, cats are generally quite playful. They love to chase balls and feathers, or just about anything dangling from a string. They especially enjoy playing when their owners are participating in the game. Contrary to popular opinion, cats can be trained. Using rewards and punishments, just like with a dog, a cat can be trained to avoid unwanted behavior or perform tricks. Cats will even fetch!

In the second place, cats are civilized members of the household. Unlike dogs, cats do not bark or make other loud noises. Most cats don't even meow very often. They generally lead a quiet existence. Cats also don't often have "accidents." Mother cats train their kittens to use the litter box, and most cats will use it without fail from that time on. Even stray cats usually understand the concept when shown the box and will use it regularly. Cats do have claws, and owners must make provision for this. A tall scratching post in a favorite cat area of the house will often keep the cat content to leave the furniture alone. As a last resort, of course, cats can be declawed.

Lastly, one of the most attractive features of cats as housepets is their ease of care. Cats do not have to be walked. They get plenty of exercise in the house as they play, and they do their business in the litter box. Cleaning a litter box is a quick, painless procedure. Cats also take care of their own grooming. Bathing a cat is almost never necessary because under ordinary circumstances cats clean themselves. Cats are more particular about personal cleanliness than people are. In addition, cats can be left home alone for a few hours without fear. Unlike some pets, most cats will not destroy the furnishings when left alone. They are content to go about their usual activities until their owners return.

Cats are low maintenance, civilized companions. People who have small living quarters or less time for pet care should appreciate these characteristics of cats. However, many people who have plenty of space and time still opt to have a cat because they love the cat personality. In many ways, cats are the ideal housepet.