SNAPSHOT: The Parts of an Academic Essay

### Memorable and Intriguing Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grabber</strong>: grab the reader’s attention and make the reader want to continue reading</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong>: the topic of the essay</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis</strong>: your opinion about the topic of the essay/what you will prove</td>
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<tr>
<th>Body Paragraphs (MEAT)*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main idea</strong>: a sentence expressing the main idea of the paragraph</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong>: support for the main idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong>: explanation of how the evidence supports the main idea</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tie/Transition</strong>: a sentence tying the paragraph together or transitioning into the next body paragraph</td>
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<th>Conclusion</th>
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<td><strong>Modified focus</strong>: restatement of the topic of the essay</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Modified thesis</strong>: restatement of your opinion on the topic of the essay</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Challenge</strong>: provocative (interesting) question, quotation, vivid image, call for action, warning, or a suggestion to the reader</td>
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* There is no set number of required body paragraphs, unless specified by your instructor. The number of body paragraphs depends on the number of points you need to make in order to prove your thesis. Likewise, there is no requirement for the amount of evidence to include in your body paragraphs. You can include as little or as much as you need to support your main idea. The important thing is that the evidence must be compelling and accurate.
Writing Effective Titles

What is one of the very first things you notice on the page when you read an essay? The title, of course! A title is the name of your essay, and should be what first captivates the reader. It is important to note some rules about writing titles.

An effective title SHOULD:
1. be centered on the top of your page
   a. If hand written, it should be on the colored line at the top of your lined paper
   b. If typed, it should be at the top of the paper, floating centered above the first paragraph OR if title page is used, it should be in the very center of the page, along with your name, period, date, teacher, etc.
2. be memorable and intriguing, and make your reader want to continue reading your paper
3. be capitalized throughout, except articles such as a, an, and the, and conjunctions such as and, but, for, nor, unless it is the first word in the title
   a. Example: Television: Has It Gone Too Far?
   b. Example: Video Game Violence and Its Effect On Teenagers
4. mention the topic of the essay

An effective title SHOULD NOT:
1. include the word “essay,” or “paper,” or “assignment” in any part of the title (i.e. Research Paper, Essay on Television, Mrs. Sanderson’s 5th Period Assignment)
2. be underlined, italicized, or put in quotation marks
3. be too long (generally 8 words maximum)
4. merely state the topic (i.e. School Uniforms, Television, Macbeth)
INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH: GRABBER → FOCUS → THESIS

Writing Grabbers

A grabber is the first sentence—and in some cases, the first few sentences—of an essay. An effective grabber should grab the reader’s attention and make the reader want to continue reading. A grabber can be in the form of a provocative question, exclamation, anecdote, or strong statement, and should always be interesting, thought-provoking, or even dramatic.

The most effective grabber can be a famous quote or familiar saying, a startling statistic, a fascinating but little-known fact, or even a very brief anecdote with a surprising twist at the end.

Writing Focus Statements

A focus statement is the topic or subject of your essay, written as a complete sentence.

For example, if your topic is healthy school lunches, you would need to take that topic and make it into a general fact: Many schools are finding ways to provide healthy school lunch selections for students.

The focus statement should not be confused with a thesis statement. The focus statement should be a broad, general view of the topic, and should be a commonly held belief or fact. Conversely, your thesis statement is your own opinion or position towards what the focus statement says. Think of this concept as an upside-down pyramid, from broad to narrow.

Writing Thesis Statements

A thesis statement is one of the most important sentences in an essay. A thesis statement is a statement of opinion or position on the topic of the essay. To qualify as a thesis statement, it must:

• state your opinion about the topic of the essay
• clearly convey how you will prove your opinion, in the order in which you will do so

For example:

Topic: body piercing/tattoos for teens
Thesis: Teens should not be allowed to get tattoos or body piercings because of the risk of infections, the permanence of the decision, and the potential career consequences.

Notice that the underlined part in the sentence above is an opinion. In other words, people can disagree or agree with this statement. Some synonyms for the word thesis are hypothesis, belief, theory, and argument. The italicized section conveys the main ideas of the essay and previews the order of the body paragraphs.

Here are some general rules to remember when writing a Thesis Statement:

• Be sure that the thesis is an opinion or your position, and doesn’t just state the topic of the paper.

For example: “Some schools require students to wear uniforms.” This proposed thesis does not
include an opinion.

*Revision:* Schools should not require students to wear uniforms.

• Be sure that your thesis does not just state a general fact—remember, that is what the Focus Statement is for.

For example: “Many students stress about homework and grades.” This proposed thesis makes a broad statement that doesn’t give enough specifics, and it does not express your opinion.

*Revision:* Grades and homework should be eliminated from schools because they cause undue stress and other health problems.

• Be sure that your thesis is not too broad.

For example: “Music has had a huge impact on fashion in the United States.” Instead of trying to cover all music and all fashion, instead, focus on a smaller idea.

*Revision:* Music of the 1940s reflected the patriotism felt by Americans during World War II because it explored national pride, traditional American values, and unity against enemies.

* Do not use “announcing” words and phrases, such as “In this essay, I will prove that [ … ].” Just state it!
BODY PARAGRAPHS: MEAT (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, Tie/Transition)

**Main Idea** is a sentence expressing the main idea of the paragraph. It is based on the ideas expressed in your thesis statement.

**Evidence** is the support for your main idea. It can be facts, statistics, examples, quotations, incidents, anecdotes, or anything else that supports the main idea. Direct evidence must be cited exactly according to the style specified by your instructor.

The following are different examples of how to cite the statement “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays”:

1. **Paraphrase (Indirect quotation)**—using different words to express the same idea; do not use quotation marks at all
   - Teachers and professors alike find that many students often misuse quotations in their papers.
2. **Direct phrase or word quote**—using only one or a few words; use quotation marks around those words only
   - Many teachers find that their students “omit or improperly use” quotes when writing papers.
3. **MLA author/page citation**—author and page in parentheses; notice the period comes after the parenthesis
   - “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).
4. **Full sentence quote with he/she said before the quotation**; place comma before the quotation mark, period
   - Watson claims, “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (43).
5. **Full sentence quote with he/she said after the quotation**; comma replaces period at the end of the quote
   - “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays,” he argues (I.vii.117).
6. **Full sentence quote with he/she said dividing the quote**; commas separate the quote.
   - “Many writers,” he admitted, “omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (lines 5-7).
7. **Full sentence quote with he/she said that at the beginning of the quote**; the word that takes the place of the comma
   - He affirmed that “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).
8. **Full sentence quote with full sentence introduction to quote**; use a colon before the quote
   - Scholars have proven with scientific evidence: “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Wilson, line 114).
9. **Omitting words within a quote**; use the ellipsis between (...)
   - “Many writers...use quotations in their essays” (15).
10. **Adding or changing words within a quote**; use brackets to set off the change
    - “Many writers [often] omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).

MORE rules for incorporating quotations in a paper:

1. Plays, novels, long poems, website titles, magazine titles, movie titles, and books should be italicized or underlined. (When typed, they should only be italicized.)
   a. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*
   b. *The Canterbury Tales*
   c. *Shakespeare in Love*
2. Articles, chapter titles, song titles, poems, short stories, and essays should be punctuated with quotation marks.
   a. Alanis Morissette’s “Ironic”
   b. Yezierska’s “America and I”
   c. Langston Hughes’s “I, Too”

3. As a rule, anyone you do not personally know should be referred to by their LAST name—not their first.
   a. William Shakespeare should be referred to as Shakespeare, not William
   b. Joseph Stalin should be referred to as Stalin, not Joseph

4. Always lead into a quotation with your own ideas or sentences; similarly, always follow a quotation with your own ideas. Follow MEAT.

5. Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.

6. Question marks, exclamation marks, semi-colons, and colons go inside quotation marks when they are part of what is being quoted. When question marks and exclamation marks are used in a quotation, do not use a comma.
   a. “You said what?” screamed the embarrassed teenager.
   b. Why do they call her “Smarty Pants”?

**Analysis** is the demonstration of how your evidence supports your main idea. Never assume that it is clear to a reader how your evidence supports your main idea. If your thoughts are not written down, they do not matter!

**Tie/Transition** is a sentence that either ties up the ideas of the paragraph or transitions into the next body paragraph.
CONCLUSION PARAGRAPHS: Modified focus → Modified thesis → Challenge

Writing Modified Focus Statements

A modified focus statement recaps the focus of the essay and the essay prompt, restating the topic presented in the prompt.

Writing Modified Thesis Statements

A modified thesis statement reiterates/restates the points that support your thesis.

Writing Challenges

A challenge is a provocative (interesting) question, quotation, vivid image, call for action, warning, or a suggestion to the reader. Like grabbers, challenges can be in the form of a rhetorical question (see box below), exclamation, or strong statement, and should always be interesting, thought-provoking, or even dramatic. The best challenges leave your reader thinking about your essay, and make them want to take action.
How to Format English Essays in Word

1. Create correct header by doing the following:
   -> Double click in top margin
   -> Page Number
   -> Top of Page
   -> Select top right page number position (Plain Number 3)
   -> Type last name in front of first page number. It will carry over to all pages.

2. To start header on first real page of essay and not cover page, do the following:
   -> Insert
   -> Page Numbers"
   -> Unselect “Show number on first page” box
   -> “format…"
   -> go to the numbering options at the bottom and set the start at “0.”

3. Double space entire essay by clicking on the line spacing icon in your tool bar (it might say “paragraph”). Be sure to select “2.0” and click on “remove space after paragraph.” **Remember, no extra line between paragraphs!**

4. Select the correct font by changing the type to “Times New Roman” and the size to “12.”

5. Remember to indent the first line of new paragraphs by hitting the “tab” key. Hit the tab key twice to indent long quotes.

6. Do not adjust margins. They are already set to 1 inch. You are now ready to go!