

There are several vital elements to any successful college essay. This handout will define those elements and show you how to put them together using an outline. Following this format will help you keep your thoughts organized and get your essay underway.

Elements of an Essay

Introduction: Usually an introduction starts broad and narrows down to your specific topic, ending in the *thesis*. This is your opportunity to establish why readers might be curious about your general topic, catch their attention, or put your essay in context.

Thesis: Your introduction should end with a clear, specific thesis statement, which will tell readers exactly what your paper will be arguing. Each *body paragraph* will directly and obviously support your thesis.

Body Paragraphs: An essay usually has at least three body paragraphs, and these will be the arguments, evidence, or topics that support your *thesis*.

Topic Sentences: Each *body paragraph* will begin with a topic sentence which introduces its topic. All of the information in that paragraph will be clearly and logically related to that *topic sentence*, which in turn should obviously relate to the *thesis*.

Support: You use arguments, data, facts, analysis, quotes, anecdotes, examples, details, etc. to support your *topic sentences* and flesh out your *body paragraphs*. A good rule of thumb is to have at least three points to support each *topic sentence*.

Transitions: An effective essay will show the connection between paragraphs with transitions. These can be the final sentence of each *body paragraph* or can be integrated into the next *topic sentence* with transition words.

Conclusion: A conclusion should wrap up your essay, but should not introduce new information or arguments. It should begin with a sentence that looks a lot like your *thesis* to summarize the general points of the paper as a whole, and then draw your paper neatly to a close.

ESSAY OUTLINE

I. Introduction:

General info about topic, reason for reader to be interested, context, etc.

Thesis statement:

II. Topic Sentence 1:

A. Support

1. Detail/example/data/explanation
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

B. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

C. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

D. Transition

III. Topic Sentence 2:

A. Support

1. Detail/example/data/explanation
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

B. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

C. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

D. Transition

IV. Topic Sentence 3:

A. Support

1. Detail/example/data/explanation
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

B. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

C. Support

1. Detail/example/etc.
2. Detail/example/etc.
3. Detail/example/etc.

D. Transition

V. Concluding Paragraph

Re-state thesis:

Summary of main points, return to general context, wrap-up of essay, etc.