

## A Shifting Structure

An academic essay is generally organized to introduce the main idea in the first paragraph called the introduction paragraph. This is then followed by multiple paragraphs to give support to that main idea called body paragraphs. Having three body paragraphs to support the main idea is common. The essay ends with a paragraph, called a conclusion paragraph, that draws a conclusion based on the information from the body paragraphs. The conclusion made in the last paragraph is usually the same main idea as was introduced in the introduction paragraph.

This structure is sometimes referred to as a traditional "five-paragraph essay." When you write a five-paragraph essay, your organization is very predictable. There is always one introduction paragraph with the thesis at the end, body paragraphs that each develop one topic related to the thesis, and a conclusion paragraph that begins with a restatement of the thesis. This structure is excellent to use when you write **short** essays (e.g., essays for AA/AB, the TOEFL independent essay, etc.).

By properly using a five-paragraph essay structure, you show that you understand the basics of American English writing. This foundation is important because once you can write a solid five-paragraph essay, then you can expand it without confusing your reader.

In **longer** academic essays, the structure has to become more flexible. Imagine an eight-page research paper with only five paragraphs! The topic and the length is too complex for a five-paragraph structure. Longer essays may have more than one paragraph for the introduction, headings may signal major parts of the essay, or one topic may be developed over several paragraphs. Do not be surprised if your advanced writing teachers ask you to stop using the five-paragraph essay for your writing assignments as you start writing longer academic essays.

Your college teachers may ask you to write something other than an essay (e.g., a literary analysis, reflection, chapter summary, etc.). Often, these other types of writing assignments will have an entirely different structure. One of the most essential steps to success when you write in college is to clearly understand the professor's expectations. If your professor shows you a sample of what you need to write, you should use the sample to help you understand what your professor expects.

This book emphasizes the importance of analyzing model writing because that will help you know how to write whatever you need to write in college, regardless of the structure of the assignment.

Consider how the following essay starts to break the patterns of a typical five-paragraph essay. The structure is less predictable, but it still follows the same general principles of good essay writing that you have learned.



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