

Essay Structure and Defending a Thesis

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1. Basic Essay Structure

1. Introduction
 - A. Thesis statement
 - B. Plan for the paper (i.e. the “roadmap”)
 - C. Background/context for thesis
2. Argument supporting the thesis
3. Assessment of Objections
4. Conclusion

1.1 Introduction

- Don't begin with clichés, irrelevant material, or superfluous points or otherwise obvious points
- Don't be long-winded. Get to your point as efficiently as you can. Note that this is compatible with providing some significant contextualization!
- Make your thesis explicit
 - It is sometimes more artful to imply rather than explicitly state your thesis, but academic writing needs to be clear, not artful (or not only artful)
- If possible, state your thesis in a single sentence
- Restrict your thesis statement to something you can feasibly defend in the allotted space
 - **Be strategic!:** Don't make a grandiose claim that you can't possibly defend in (e.g.) 2-3 pages
- Provide a roadmap for the paper's argument
 - This roadmap needn't have every detail

1.2 Body (The Argumentative Support/Evidence for the Thesis)

- State and develop only one point per paragraph
 - If a point is complex (i.e. consists of multiple sub-points) it can be extended over more than paragraph, but then you should have no more than one subpoint per paragraph
- Not all premises of your argument require support
 - some things need to be assumed. You can't prove everything relevant to your argument
- Know which parts of your argument are obvious and which controversial
- Remember that the ultimate evaluation of any argument is based on its **validity** and **soundness**!
- The job of an analytical essay is to put forth a sound argument in as straightforward and convincing a manner as possible
- Be sure you respond to objections, **especially** if they are immediately obvious to anyone who might consider your argument
 - If you don't have an adequate response to an objection — admit it!
 - * alternatively — **change your thesis** to accommodate the objection
- Make sure you do everything in the body of your paper that your introduction claimed you would!

1.3 Conclusion

- State the upshot of the argument
 - What was the argument?
 - What was shown?
 - How (in brief) was the argument's truth demonstrated?
 - Is there any further consequence of the argument that is worth briefly mentioning?

- Make sure that the point stated in the conclusion properly matches the point of the argument as stated in the introduction. Your reader has certain expectations based on what was said in the introduction. Be sure these match with what's said in the conclusion.

2. Advice

- Don't be afraid to write the introduction last!
 - The most important thing about the paper is the thesis statement and the argument for it
 - The actual intro is sometimes best written after you have properly developed your thesis statement and perhaps even written a draft of the body of the paper
- Don't be afraid to write the conclusion first!
 - If you already have a good idea of what you're arguing and how, as well as any upshot of the argument, then you might be able to write your conclusion and work backwards
- Outlining Helps!
 - Writing the thesis statement, and developing a roadmap can really help you figure out where you need to spend time/energy in developing your argument
 - If the outline is sufficiently developed (e.g. thesis, roadmap, sketch of actual arguments in body) the paper is 90% written. Everything else is just connecting tissue.
- Proofread!
 - If you don't want to proofread, ask your roommate or one of your friends to. Their spending 10 minutes can make a big difference to your paper.