

# WRITING A BASIC ESSAY



## EVERY CLASS IS A WRITING CLASS

Someone once said that writing is the edifice upon which all learning in higher education is built. That said, you should expect to write in virtually all of your classes—not just in your English courses.

The basic form of writing is the five-paragraph essay. The objective of this handout is to help you to:

- Understand the elements of the basic five-paragraph essay.
- Write an effective thesis statement.
- Develop supporting arguments.
- Write detailed paragraphs using the M.E.A.L. format.
- Write an effective conclusion.

The basic five-paragraph essay consists of:

- An introductory paragraph
- Three body paragraphs
- A concluding paragraph



*“The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.” — Gustave Flaubert*

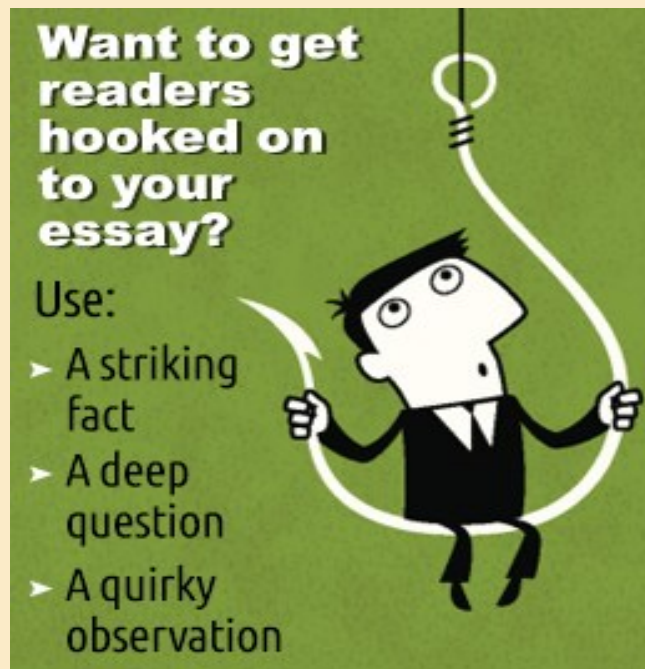
### Vocabulary

- **Hook:** sequence of sentences that gets the reader’s attention.
- **Roadmap:** previews the supporting arguments that support the thesis statement.
- **M.E.A.L.:** acronym for the parts of the paragraph (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Linkage).
- **Thesis statement:** takes a position that someone could debate and that explicitly identifies the purpose of the paper or previews its main ideas (see LEO handout).

# INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

The most important paragraph is the introduction, which is comprised of the hook, the background, and the thesis statement.

<b>Hook</b>	Just as a fisherman baits the hook to attract fish, you need to bait your paragraph with a sentence that captures the reader's attention.	<i>"A dog is man's best friend."</i>
<b>Background</b>	Once you have the reader's attention, provide additional details. This can include information about the opposition's point of view, which will make your argument stronger.	<i>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.</i>
<b>Thesis Statement</b>	Now it's time to take a position.	<i>Despite what dog lovers may believe, cats make excellent house pets as...</i>
<b>Roadmap</b>	Use your roadmap to preview the points that support your thesis.	<i>... (A) they are good companions, (B) they are civilized members of the household, and (C) they are easy to care for.</i>



## BODY PARAGRAPHS

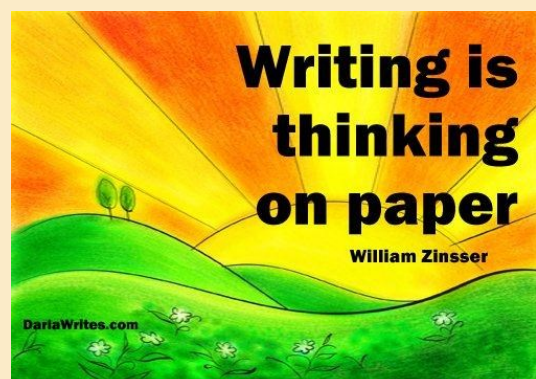
Follow the introduction with three body paragraphs consisting of the following information taken, in order, from the thesis statement:

### SUPPORTING ARGUMENT A:

<b>Main Idea</b>	What is the paragraph about?	<i>People enjoy the companionship of cats.</i>
<b>Evidence</b>	Paraphrases, quotes, facts, statistics.	<i>Cats are affectionate.</i> <i>Cats like to snuggle and play.</i> <i>Cats can be trained to avoid bad behavior.</i>
<b>Analysis</b>	Why does this evidence \$#@cking matter?	<i>People love pets who are affectionate and playful.</i>
<b>Linkage</b>	Link the topic sentence to something—either back to your main thesis or to the next paragraph (preferably to both of them).	<i>These qualities are very similar to dogs' qualities.</i>

### SUPPORTING ARGUMENT B:

<b>Main Idea</b>	<i>Cats are civilized members of the household.</i>
<b>Evidence</b>	<i>Cats don't bark.</i> <i>Cats use litter boxes.</i>
<b>Analysis</b>	<i>Cats are quieter than dogs.</i> <i>Cats don't have "accidents."</i>
<b>Linkage</b>	<i>These qualities make cats more civilized.</i>



## BODY PARAGRAPHS (continued)

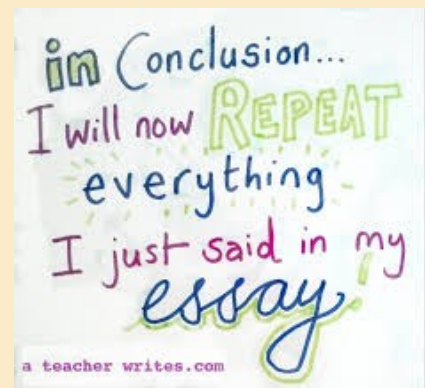
### SUPPORTING ARGUMENT C:

<b>Main Idea</b>	<i>Cats are easy to take care of.</i>
<b>Evidence</b>	<i>Cats exercise by playing in the house.</i> <i>Cats use litter boxes.</i> <i>Cats groom themselves.</i> <i>Cats can be left alone.</i>
<b>Analysis</b>	<i>Cats do not have to be walked.</i> <i>Cats are easier to clean up after.</i> <i>Cats do not have to be groomed.</i> <i>Cats don't need constant attention and care.</i> <i>Cats won't destroy the house when unsupervised.</i>
<b>Linkage</b>	<i>These qualities make cats more civilized.</i>

## CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

Your concluding paragraph should be just as compelling as the hook. Start with a summary of the thesis and supporting statements, but don't end there. Instead, finish with a final thought such as an analysis, solution, or suggestion for future research. Also, avoid the phrase "In conclusion." After all, it's the last paragraph—of course it's the conclusion!

<b>Restate thesis</b>	<i>A cat can be as wonderful a pet as a dog. In some cases, cats are even better than dogs.</i>
<b>Summarize Argument A</b>	<i>However, many people who have plenty of space and time still opt to have a cat because they love the cat personality.</i>
<b>Summarize Argument B</b>	<i>Cats are low maintenance, civilized companions.</i>
<b>Summarize Argument C</b>	<i>People who have small living quarters or less time for pet care should appreciate these characteristics of cats.</i>
<b>Final Thought</b>	<i>In many ways, cats are the ideal house pet.</i>



## COMPLETED ESSAY

Once you have compiled the elements of your essay, it will be easy to write. The following is a completed essay based on the outline on the previous pages.

"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. According to *The Atlantic*, "Dog lovers will find it baffling that cats are the world's most popular pet. After all, they're passive-aggressive, emotionally unavailable, and known for their chilly independence—traits that at most qualify felines for the role of 'man's best frenemy'" (Guilford). For many people, however, a cat is their best friend. Despite what dog lovers may believe, cats make excellent house pets as they are good companions, they are civilized members of the household, and they are easy to care for.

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? Even 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, removing this last obstacle to civility.

Lastly, one of the most attractive features of cats as house pets 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.

A cat can be as wonderful a pet as a dog. In some cases, cats are even better than dogs. 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 house pet.

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## REFERENCES

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