

# Structuring Body Paragraphs

*An Academic Writing Workshop*



Compiled by the  
Academic Support Center  
& the  
Library Resources  
Division

# *About this Workshop Series*

*Strong academic writing does not typically develop “naturally”; rather, it is an acquired skill that all college students must learn. Even the most skillful writers will have room for improvement. This workshop series thus aims to break down the writing process into key focus areas for improvement. By following these tips and techniques, you can become a more effective writer, whatever your level.*

# Approaching Writing

First, we must recognize academic writing as a Process. Strong essays cannot be written overnight! Be sure to schedule in time for:

- Pre-writing – brainstorm words or phrases, free write for 5 minutes, create a thought cluster, etc.
- Planning – create a thesis, assemble evidence, create an outline
- Practice – draft, edit, & repeat!



# Outlining: a Critical Blueprint

Strong academic writing has a clear structure. Start by drafting an outline to help you stay on track.

## Sample Outline:

- Intro Paragraph
  - ✓ Hook
  - ✓ Context
  - ✓ Thesis
- Body Paragraph (repeat as needed)
  - ✓ Topic Sentence
  - ✓ Concrete Detail
  - ✓ Analysis
  - ✓ Transition Sentence
- Conclusion
  - ✓ Summary
  - ✓ Significance



*No architect would construct a building without a detailed floor plan; why would anyone attempt to write an essay without an outline?*

# Developing Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs present evidence or *main ideas* that support your essay's thesis. Each body paragraph should introduce a main idea, give examples or evidence, and analyze examples or evidence. To maintain clarity, each body paragraph should contain only one main idea.

There is no set number of body paragraphs that you need for your essay, and you will find that body paragraphs tend to increase in number as your thesis becomes more complex.

# Structuring Body Paragraphs

## Body Paragraph #1

- (a) **Topic Sentence** to state main idea
- (b) **Concrete detail or 'evidence'** to support main idea
- (c) **Analysis** of this evidence
- (d) Concrete detail
- (e) Analysis
- (f) **Transition Sentence** to relate body paragraph back to your thesis or to connect to the next body paragraph

# Writing Topic Sentences

*A topic sentence functions like a mini-thesis in that it lets the reader know what the **main idea** of the paragraph will be, and why this idea is **important**.*

Strong topic sentences:

- Use transitional phrases
- Specifically name a main idea
- Do not reveal too much about the evidence



# Writing Topic Sentences

Tip #1: ***Echo language*** from your thesis

Example: *Shakespeare uses the chorus to indicate early on in the play that Romeo and Juliet cannot escape their fate, try as they might.*

Tip #2: Use ***transitional phrases***

Example: *Similarly, Shakespeare's characterization of the two lovers as naïve illustrates the idea that it is foolish to try to escape fate.*

# Using Concrete Details

*What makes for **good evidence**?*

Consider using:

- Paraphrased examples
- In-line quotations
- Block quotations

*When using concrete details, **avoid**:*

- Dropping evidence in without any context
- Leaving off the proper citations
- Forgetting to analyze the evidence's meaning



# Try a Quote Sandwich!

**Top Bun:** Set up Quote

**Meat:** Cite the Quote

**Bottom Bun:** Analyze the Quote



Example:

The chorus introduces us to the setting of the play and to our two main characters. **In this metered song, the chorus refers to Romeo and Juliet as “star-crossed lovers” (2).** This phrase functions to illustrate that the lovers are not meant to be together, based on some celestial ordination, or destiny. Since it is used at the play’s beginning, before we even meet the characters or before any action happens, this phrase creates an element of foreshadowing. We know that their attempts to be together will be futile in the end.



# Transitional Sentences

- *Don't end with analysis...*doing so may make your body paragraphs seem like separate, disconnected ideas.
- In order for body paragraphs to work together, *transitional sentences* are necessary!
- Effective transitional sentences connect your analysis *back to the thesis.*

*Want more on this topic? Ready to  
work on your body paragraphs  
with a writing tutor?*

Contact the Academic Support Center at:

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**Thank you!**