

# Anatomy of an Essay

## The Introduction

To write a satisfactory introductory paragraph, the writer must include three fundamental parts: the attention getter, the bridge, and the thesis statement.

### ❖ The Attention-Getter

The purpose of the attention-getter is to capture the reader's attention, to make him or her want to continue reading. The length of the attention-getter will vary depending on which type you use. The following are types of attention-getters:

1. Narrative / Anecdote – tell a true or fictional story related to your topic
2. Illustration – give a specific example related to your topic
3. Startling Statistic – provide shocking or surprising information
4. Analogy – draw a comparison between your subject and something else
5. Rhetorical Question – use a well-chosen, relevant question (or questions) to raise the reader's curiosity
6. Definition – define your topic if the meaning is vague or uncommon
7. Statement of Opposing View – for effect, build up one point of view in the attention-getter and then change it in the thesis
8. Quotation – select a quotation from an important authority, a famous personality, or a fragment of verse or prose that is relevant to your thesis
9. Compare / Contrast – present a series of contrasting examples

### ❖ The Bridge

Because attention getters represent broad ideas and thesis statements represent narrow, focused ideas, directly connecting them is often awkward. However, if the ideas are not logically connected, the reader is required to jump across this gulf of ideas in order to make the connection. Since the gulf must be crossed, providing a “bridge” for the reader to cross is better than having the reader jump to a random sentence. Some readers are unable to make the jump, so you have lost their attention before you have even begun. Take the following example:

Attention Getter:	How many times does a National Football League team rally from twenty-one points behind in the fourth quarter to win the game?
Thesis Statement:	The Dallas Cowboys have historically been the luckiest team in the National Football League.

Even though these two statements are loosely connected (they both involve football), to have the second immediately follow the first leaves the reader “in the gap” wondering what logical

connection there might be between the National Football League, twenty-one points, rallying, and the Dallas Cowboys.

A writer must, therefore, *bridge* these two seemingly dissimilar ideas. Consider the following:

How often does a team come from twenty-one points behind to win in the National Football League? In the 1997 football season, such a feat did not happen a single time. And yet, it occurred on Sunday of the first weekend of the 1999 season during the Dallas-Washington football game. No one will doubt the role of luck in such a comeback, and all teams enjoy some measure of luck at one time or another, but the Dallas Cowboy franchise appears to have had more than its share. In fact, many consider the Cowboys to be the luckiest franchise in the history of the National Football League.

Note how the “bridge” (underlined in the above example) works on a basic level. Three ideas are mentioned in the thesis which are not mentioned in the attention getter. These are “the Dallas Cowboys,” the concept of “luck,” and the opinion that “the Cowboys are lucky.” Note in the example how we work the writing to bring the concept of the Dallas team into the essay. Later, the concept of luck is introduced, and finally, before the thesis, the two are linked in one sentence, and the concept comes full circle.

#### ❖ Writing the Thesis Statement

1. Write a complete sentence (simple or complex, not compound)
2. Avoid "be" verbs (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been, has, have, had)
3. Avoid mentioning the paper such as "In this essay, I will..."
4. Make sure your thesis includes an opinion worth proving, not an observable fact.

Wrong: My essay is about the works of John Keats and how his life affected his writing.

**RIGHT:** John Keats's family history of illness and early death affected the tone of his poetry.

Wrong: Charles Dickens wrote many novels that include compelling child characters.

**RIGHT:** Charles Dickens demonstrates poor economic conditions in Victorian England through the experiences of his novels' compelling child characters.

### **Basic Paragraph Structure: Two Methods**

*Please note that these outlines provide only a guideline for structuring paragraphs. They are NOT meant to dictate precise numbers of sentences in paragraphs or essays and should not be interpreted rigidly. Students should adapt these structures to fit their specific evidence and main ideas. **The objective is to make sure that each body paragraph supports the thesis statement, includes ample evidence through text, facts, and details, and includes the writer's own thoughts and observations about the supporting detail.***

### ❖ Eight Sentence Paragraph Format

This format is also called “chunk writing.” Despite the name, each paragraph can have more than eight sentences. The writer may have additional concrete details and/or commentary.

The basic outline for this format is as follows:

- I. Topic Sentence [1]
  - A. Concrete detail [2]
    - 1. Commentary [3]
    - 2. Commentary [4]
  - B. Concrete detail [5]
    - 1. Commentary [6]
    - 2. Commentary [7]
  - C. Summary Sentence or Transition sentence [8]

The following is an example of a paragraph written in eight-sentence format:

[topic sentence →] Draco Malfoy's harsh features indicate his tendency to cause trouble. [concrete detail →] His "sleek blond hair and pointed chin were just like his father's" (Rowling 194). [commentary →] The words "sleek" and "pointed" remind one of something rigid and fixed. [commentary →] Malfoy is unwilling to compromise or try to get along with the others at Hogwarts like his father who buys his way into getting what he wants. [concrete detail →] Likewise, as Ron and Hermione laugh at Draco, his "lip curl[s]" and he replies with "smirking" (194). [commentary →] The children always wonder what ill-will Draco has in store for them behind the crooked and arrogant smile. [commentary →] Draco's face cannot hide his malicious nature and his ability to spoil the plans of the well-meaning students. [summary sentence →] While looks can be deceiving, Draco's looks provide a clue to the reader that danger lurks ahead.

### ❖ Majors/Minors Paragraph Format:

While either format is acceptable, we encourage more experienced writers to explore the majors/minors format. Major supports are general statements that the writer wishes to prove; minor supports offer specific proof and elaboration. This format also is flexible, and additional major or minor supports can be used as needed, as can be seen in the example.

The basic outline for the majors/minors format is:

- I. Topic Sentence
  - A. Major Support
    - 1. Minor Support (detail, facts, evidence)
    - 2. Minor Support
  - B. Major Support
    - 1. Minor Support
    - 2. Minor Support
  - C. Major Support
    - 1. Minor Support

## 2. Minor Support

### D. Summary Sentence or Transition sentence

The following is an example of a paragraph written in majors/minors format:

[topic sentence →] In most cases, college students enjoy much more freedom than high school students. [major point →] In college, students often have more free time than they had in high school. [minor point →] For example, college classes generally meet every other day rather than every day. [minor point →] Also, students may be in class for three to four hours instead of seven or eight. [minor point →] However, students must learn quickly that the extra hours in the day are best used for doing school work since no class time is given for this in college. [major point →] College also shifts accountability from the parents and teachers to the students. [minor point →] In many college classes, the professor does not take roll; therefore, students are free to decide when they will go to class. [minor point →] Likewise, students must keep up with longer reading assignments and more information without the benefit of daily reminders and weekly quizzes. [minor point →] Students can schedule their studying around other events, but many learn very soon that keeping up with the professor's syllabus will result in greater success. [major point →] New college students are generally the most excited about social freedom. [minor point →] College co-eds, for the most part, enjoy a curfew-free environment for the first time. [minor point →] Students also spend their money as they wish and develop their own budgets. This often results in the stereotypical phone call home for money. [minor point →] After running out of money one time too often or oversleeping because they stayed out too late again, college students learn the ultimate value of budgets and curfews. [concluding statement →] Even though some of the lessons are hard to learn, college students still find that the extra freedom they enjoy in college is a welcome change.

### **Topic Sentence**

A **topic sentence** is the one point or main idea that the body paragraph makes about the subject. It is one reason why the thesis statement is valid.

Make sure that when you write your essay that each body paragraph has a solid topic sentence. Since your topic sentence is one reason why the thesis is valid, your topic sentence can be a “because” statement. For example:

Thesis statement + *because* + reason

My grandma's house is my special place because her furniture is comfortable.

This whole paragraph will then describe how Grandma's comfortable furniture makes her house a special place.

Your topic sentences should directly reflect the idea of your thesis statement. They may even include your thesis statement in their subject. Your reader should be able to look at any of your topic sentences and understand what the thesis statement is without knowing your thesis statement ahead of time.

The rest of your body paragraph is evidence in the form of concrete detail and commentary/ elaboration (or major and minor supports).

### **Evidence: Support with Detail or Text**

A **concrete detail** is a fact, quotation, piece of evidence, or statement used in support of your topic sentence. Each body paragraph will consist of at least two concrete details on which you will elaborate.

In the following example, the concrete detail follows the topic sentence and is underlined:

My grandma's house is my special place because her furniture is comfortable. For example, the minute I relax on her couch, I find myself drifting off to sleep.

In this concrete detail, the writer uses the couch as evidence of Grandma's comfortable furniture.

### **Paraphrasing and Using Quotations**

There are three ways you can use other people's information:

1. **Paraphrase** – rewriting the information in your own words
2. **Embedded Quotation** – quoting (word for word) only a few key words or phrases
3. **Full Quotation** –quoting (word for word) an entire sentence or paragraph

The best papers will blend all the three methods. To understand how to paraphrase and use quotations, we will use a paragraph taken from Ray Bradbury's afterword to his novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

#### ***ORIGINAL SAMPLE***

Finally, many readers have written protesting Clarisse's disappearance, wondering what happened to her. Francois Truffaut felt the same curiosity, and in the film version of my novel, rescued Clarisse from oblivion and located her with the book people wandering in the forest, reciting their litany of books to themselves. I felt the same need to save her, for after all, she, verging on silly star-struck chatter, was in many ways responsible for Montag's beginning to wonder about books and what was in them. In my play, therefore, Clarisse emerges to welcome Montag, and give a somewhat happier ending to what was, in essence, pretty grim stuff.

#### **Paraphrase**

❖ *Rewrite information into your own words without changing the author's meaning or intent.*

For example:

Bradbury writes in the afterword to *Fahrenheit 451* that, like the man who directed the film version of the novel, he too feels the need to resurrect Clarisse. In the play he writes of the novel, he does have Clarisse meet Montag at the end. This makes sense since Clarisse was so important in awakening Montag to think for himself (178).

### Embedded Quotation

- ❖ *Carefully choose a few words or a phrase to quote word for word; put the author's exact words in quotation marks and blend with paraphrase.*
- ❖ Embedded quotations are an effective and powerful way to share the author's exact words while still maintaining your own voice.
- ❖ The words or phrases you choose to quote should be significant—in general, do not quote facts (i.e. In the original example, it would be a waste of a quotation to quote "Bradbury writes in the afterword." There is nothing profound about that.)

For example:

Bradbury writes in the afterword to *Fahrenheit 451* that when he wrote a play of his novel, he "rescues Clarisse from oblivion," as did the man who directed the film version of the novel (178). Bradbury believes this is appropriate because her "silly, star-struck chatter" was crucial in helping Montag learn to wonder and think for himself (178).

### Full Quotation

- ❖ *If you find a sentence, or several sentences, with such significance that not using the author's exact words will cause your paper to lack effectiveness or accuracy, then you may include them word for word in your paper; put quotation marks around author's exact words.*
- ❖ Full quotations are only effective if used sparingly.
- ❖ The sentence(s) you choose to quote should be significant—again, in general, do not quote facts

For example:

#### Short Quotation (4 lines or fewer)

In talking about why he wrote Clarisse back into the play version of his novel, Bradbury says, "I felt the same need to save her, for after all, she, verging on silly star-struck chatter, was in many ways responsible for Montag's beginning to wonder about books and what was in them" (178).

Long Quotation (more than 4 lines): Indent entire block of text one inch and omit quotation marks; in this one instance, the punctuation goes before the internal documentation.

In talking about why he wrote Clarisse back into the play version of his novel, Bradbury says,

I felt the same need to save her, for after all, she, verging on silly star-struck chatter, was in many ways responsible for Montag's beginning to wonder about books and what was in them. In my play, therefore, Clarisse emerges to welcome Montag and give a somewhat happier ending to what was, in essence, pretty grim stuff. (178)

### Omissions in Quotations

Sometimes it is necessary to take out or change part of a quotation in order to maintain the flow and structure of your paper. These are a few guidelines:

- ❖ If you leave out any words in a quotation in order to maintain the flow of your paper, you must insert an ellipsis (three dots) in brackets to indicate where the omission occurs. In the following example, the words *in essence* were omitted:  

**Example:** In Bradbury's play, "Clarisse emerges to welcome Montag, and give a somewhat happier ending to what was [...] pretty grim stuff" (178).
- ❖ Do not leave out any words that will change the meaning of a sentence you are quoting. This is not honest.
- ❖ Also use brackets [ ] if you add words of your own or make other changes, such as using *he* in place of *I* or changing a verb tense, to fit the quotation into the structure and grammar of your own sentence.

### **Commentary and Elaboration**

**Commentary** and **elaboration** are your opinion, interpretation, insight, personal response, evaluation, reflection, or supporting evidence about a concrete detail in an essay. When you write commentary and elaboration, you are "commenting on" a point that you have made. There are several types of commentary or elaboration, and the acronym **SCOPE** may help you.

**S → Statistics:** Use reasonable data and/or refer to sources

Example: [concrete detail →] Teen drivers are some of the most dangerous on the road.  
[commentary →] In fact, Time magazine has stated that teens are the worst drivers we face, and studies have shown that teens are involved in forty-seven percent of all accidents.

**C → Comparisons:** Reference the detail to something that has meaning to the reader, something to which it can be related.

Example: [concrete detail →] Teen drivers are some of the most dangerous on the road.  
[commentary →] Many drive as though they were Indy 500 racers.

**O → Outcomes:** Make a connection between the reason and outcome (effect)

Example: [concrete detail →] Teen drivers are often guilty of exceeding the speed limit.  
[commentary →] Driving in this manner often causes the driver to lose control and crash.

**P → Personal Anecdote:** Relate a *short* personal story.

Example: [concrete detail →] Teen drivers are some of the most dangerous on the road.  
[commentary →] When I was younger, I was no exception. I loved speed and would often go to deserted stretches of highway to enjoy the exhilaration of racing down the road.

**E → Example:** Describe a situation or event.

**Example:** [concrete detail →] Teen drivers are some of the most dangerous on the road.  
 [commentary →] Just last week John Smith, a sixteen year old, was clocked by the police at eighty miles per hour while he was driving on Mellow Meadow Dr.

Note that each concrete detail is followed by commentary/elaboration—an extension of the idea. In your writing, you may mix methods of commentary and elaboration but do not leave this important information out.

### **Summary Sentence**

The **summary sentence** reflects the topic sentence. Basically, all you need to do is reword the topic sentence. As you mature as a writer, the summary sentence can also be used as a transition sentence into your next body paragraph.

It is important to remember never to introduce new information or new ideas in your summary sentence. This sentence is strictly for summarizing what you have said in the body paragraph and transitioning to the next main idea of your paper.

### **Transitions**

Transitional words and phrases serve as a way to link your thoughts from one sentence to the next sentence, from one idea to the next idea, or from one paragraph to the next paragraph. Transitions also help your sentences and paragraphs flow together seamlessly by preventing jumps between thoughts—this provides coherence. See the table below for an organized list of transitional words and phrases.

<b><i>Purpose</i></b>	<b><i>Transition Words &amp; Phrases</i></b>
Sequence	again, also, and, and then, besides, finally, first...second...third, furthermore, last, moreover, next, still, too
Time	after a bit, after a few days, after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, earlier, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, then, thereafter, until, when
Comparison	again, also, in the same way, likewise, once more, similarly
Contrast	although, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the one hand, regardless, still, though, yet
Examples	after all, even, for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, of course, specifically, such as, the following example, to illustrate
Cause and Effect	accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, hence, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end
Place	above, adjacent to, below, beyond, closer to, elsewhere, far, farther on, here, near, nearby, opposite to, there, to the left, to the right
Concession	although it is true that, granted that, I admit that, it may appear that, naturally, of course
Summary/ Conclusion	as a result, as has been noted, as I have said, as we have seen, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize



## **Conclusion**

Every essay should include an ending called the conclusion. For shorter essays, often a strong concluding sentence at the end of the last body paragraph will suffice. For longer essays, however, a separate concluding paragraph is more appropriate. (Ask your teacher for specific requirements). In each case, the information should avoid any new information. The words should "echo" the ideas in the thesis statement. The most effective conclusions will then connect the idea in the thesis to a larger issue such as the writer himself, the community, or another related topic or literary work. One technique for conclusions, called "bookending," relates back specifically to the original attention-getting device in the introduction.

## **Guidelines for MLA Formatting**

### **MLA Basics**

1. **Paper:** Your paper must be word-processed on unlined 8 1/2" x 11" white paper.
2. **Margins:** Use 1" margins on all sides of the page.
3. **Name and page numbers:** Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right hand corner one-half inch from the top of the page and one inch from the right side of the paper. (use the header function for this step). Number all pages including page one (and your works cited page if research is involved). It should look like this: **Travolta 5** (DO NOT write p. or page. DO NOT put in a hyphen. DO NOT write your first name.)

Wrong: Travolta p. 5

Wrong: Travolta page 5

Wrong: John Travolta -5

**RIGHT: Travolta 5**

4. **Spacing:** Double space your entire paper. That means your heading, your long quotations, and works cited. DO NOT triple or quadruple space.
5. **Heading:** Your heading will appear one inch from the top and left edges of your paper only on the first page. Double space between each of the following: **your complete name, your teacher's name, the name of your class, and the complete date in this form: 24 October 2006**. Be sure to double space; do not triple or quadruple space. See the example below.

		Travolta 1
John Travolta		
Mrs. Davis		

English III-1

24 October 2005

Life After Vinny Barbarino

Begin essay here....

6. **Title:** Return only once after the date and center your title. Use upper and lowercase letters, not all capitals; do not enclose your title in quotation marks. Underline only words that need to be underlined, such as titles of books. Return once after the title, indent and begin your first paragraph.
7. **Indentions:** Indent five spaces (or 1/2") from your left margin. (one tab)
8. **Paragraphing:** Do not leave a single line of a paragraph at the bottom or the top of a page.