

# Designing the Essay

So you've brainstormed and done some research for your paper. Now what?

### **Review Notes in Preparation to Write**

Remember that the information in the paper, although often compiled from borrowed sources, must be thoroughly reorganized and expressed in your own style. Your job is to blend your own words and ideas with the materials uncovered in your research—the quotations, facts, statistics, studies and opinions of others—into an original paper. Also remember, documenting the paper requires that you cite any source from which you have derived information or ideas, including paraphrases and summaries.

### **See Writing (or Revising) a Thesis Statement Handout and Develop a Working Thesis for Your Paper**

#### **Begin the Rough Draft**

1. Once your working outline is complete, you are ready to begin the preliminary rough draft. Use your outline to guide your paragraphs. At this time, just get your initial ideas down as you follow the outline. You will incorporate your note cards in the next draft.
2. Develop paragraphs thoroughly—several sentences per paragraph are needed to make your point, illustrate your point, and explain your point.
3. Use adequate transitions. Some of the more commonly used transitions are connectives—conjunctive adverbs (however, consequently, on the other hand, as a result of, moreover, therefore), numbers (first, second, thirdly not firstly, or secondly), and the use of pronouns to refer to something previously mentioned.
4. Give yourself sufficient time to draft, rewrite and revise, and then to edit and proofread.

## Writing the Introduction

### The Purpose of an Introduction

1. To situate your paper in the larger conversation about your topic.
2. To motivate the reader to want to continue to read the rest of your paper with an effective opening.
3. To establish any background or historical information, when necessary, which needs clarifying or needs to be presented for the reader to properly understand your paper.
4. To identify your specific thesis.

Your introduction may vary in length to one or more paragraphs, depending on the length or purpose of the paper.

### What to Avoid

- Announcing your topic with a statement like, "This paper will attempt to..." or "I am writing my research paper on..."
- Using clichés
- Beginning with a definition from Webster's dictionary
- Repetition of the title
- Simple questions such as, "Have you ever . . . ?"

### An introduction CAN begin with:

- A quotation that relates to the topic
- An anecdote or brief narrative
- Relating your topic to something well known
- Background information
- A striking statement or interesting fact
- A paradox

- Providing a brief summary
- A related piece of data, special evidence, or statistic
- A definition of important terms—but not merely one derived from a desk dictionary
- A question—but an interesting one like, “Why are some words called obscene?”
- Taking exception to the critical view of others
- A challenge of an assumption or a glance at the opposition
- A statement that concedes a point to the argument on the other side
- A statement of a long-term effect without stating the cause

## Body Paragraph Development

### P.I.E.

#### **Point --**

make your point—often this is done in your topic sentence or transition into the paragraph

#### **Illustrate --**

illustrate your point—provide *specific support* (specific examples, observations, case studies, statistics, statements from authorities)

#### **Explain --**

Explain how your illustrations relate to the main idea (point) of the paragraph and, therefore, your thesis.

### SAMPLE P.I.E. BODY PARAGRAPH

**POINT:** Masaccio's *Trinity with the Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and Donors*, painted around 1426-27, uses linear perspective to bring the viewer into close connection with the crucified Christ (56—Fig.17.17) and to remind him or her of life beyond death. **ILLUSTRATION/EVIDENCE:** Looking at the wall fresco, the viewer's eye is drawn into the image of a church's vaulted archway with the vanishing point being created from the top of the arch to the bottom of the foundation or bottom of the Cross (57--Fig. 17.18). We see several worlds through this archway: a sarcophagus at the base with a skeleton, the crucified Christ, and the resurrected Christ standing above and behind Christ on the cross in a strong triangular composition that evokes the Trinity. **EXPLANATION:** This image literally gives a portal into worlds: it's a glimpse into the coming resurrection with the figure behind and above Christ on the cross and yet a further archway leading elsewhere even beyond that. A visual illusion and tour de force, Masaccio's *Trinity* invites the viewer to experience the mystery of salvation to come with their own eyes. This portal offers a symbolic promise of another world, but is anchored by real-world donors who are just outside the arches, just as the viewer, too, is still in this worldly space.

## SAMPLE P.I.E.T.I.E. BODY PARAGRAPH

### (MULTIPLE PIECES OF EVIDENCE EXPLAINED WITH TRANSITIONS\*)

**POINT:** Zinsser builds his emotional connection to student readers with his powerful use of repetition to describe the bind students often find themselves in: caught between their ideals and their parents' need for security.

**ILLUSTRATION/EVIDENCE:** For example, when Zinsser writes about students' desires for straightforward answers, he stresses that "there will be plenty of time to change jobs, change careers, change whole attitudes and approaches" (446). **EXPLANATION:** The emphasis in this sentence is on the repetition of the verb "change": in fact, the sentence reminds students that change is inevitable and security is not. **TRANSITION TO NEXT PIECE OF**

**EVIDENCE ON SAME POINT:** He uses repetition again, but this second time focusing on the noun, "security." **ILLUSTRATION/EVIDENCE:** He writes, "They want a map . . . that they can follow unswervingly to career security, financial security, Social Security, and presumably, a prepaid grave" (446).

**EXPLANATION:** In the first sentence that really addresses the parental audience, the verb "change" indicates the process of movement continually happening. In the second, the repetition of the noun, "security" reflects the student's desire to hold on to security as an object and can evoke the parents' and students' sense of a life with transformative potential, rather than a pre-



made script. **TRANSITION TO NEXT PIECE OF EVIDENCE ON SAME**

**POINT:** Finally, he repeats yet another verb, the verb “wish.”

**ILLUSTRATION/EVIDENCE:** He writes, “What I wish for all students is some release from the clammy grip of the future. I wish them a chance to savor each segment of their education. . . . I wish them the right to experiment” (448).

**EXPLANATION:** By repeating the phrase “I wish,” Zinsser conveys almost a sense of prayer regarding the liberation of the student from the “future’s clammy grip,” since repetition can have the effect of a kind of mantra. The repeating may make it happen. In these passages, the repetition makes his argument memorable for his readers, just as repetition in a song chorus does in music.

\*Structure might change depending on the type(s) of evidence you provide. For example, you might have PITIE or PITIETIE.

## Writing the Conclusion

An effective research paper does not just stop. You must summarize what you had to say and tie all of your ideas together to come to a logical conclusion. Your conclusion, however, should not be merely a dull restatement of your introduction. It must leave your reader not only with a sense of completeness, but also a feeling that you have kept the promise you made in your thesis. In the conclusion, you can add emphasis to your key ideas to clarify the importance of your point(s) and/or establish the implications of your thesis.

### **Two popular techniques for concluding your research paper are:**

#### **(a) Summarize**

You restate your thesis and summarize the main points you used to support it (or vice versa). This is like a quick review, but shouldn't simply restate your introduction.

#### **(b) Interpret**

You offer your final perspective or interpretation of the information you have discussed in the body of your paper and/or reflect on why your thesis is important. While you may provide new insight, make sure the focus is still on your original thesis.

These are not the only techniques possible.

### **Other elements of conclusions could be:**

- Use a famous quotation (related to the content of your research) and make an analogy.
- Use an effective quote that may not be famous but relates to topic.
- Return to a theme question or image in your introduction.

- Finish with an anecdote or appropriate brief narrative.
- Mention the broad or long-term implications.
- End with a hypothetical question related to your research—a question that requires further thought.
- End with an ironic twist or an unexpected turn of thought.
- Offer a directive.
- End with a call for action urging the reader to respond in some way.
- End on a note of high persuasion or challenge to the reader.
- Compare past to present.
- Offer a solution.

**What to avoid:**

- Repeating word for word the thesis statement.
- Introducing new information or different ideas (afterthoughts). If the ideas are important, they should be worked into the body of the paper where they can be fully discussed and proved. If they are not important enough for the body, then leave them out—the danger is that the reader will be left with unproven, unsubstantiated ideas as the final impression of your work.
- Offering just a vague generalization (or obvious statement) like, “As one can see, alcoholics have many problems.”
- Offering a vague moral: “We should all be kind to one another.”
- Beginning with “thus,” “finally,” “in conclusion,” or “to summarize” (unless your conclusion runs several paragraphs and you need this phrase as a signal to your reader).
- Questions that raise new issues, but rhetorical questions that restate the issues are acceptable.
- Stopping at an awkward spot or trailing off into meaningless or irrelevant information.

## Works Cited or References

What kind of information goes into an entry in a Works Cited or References page?

- Person, persons, or group responsible for the material
- Title of the material
- Amplifying information to help identify or describe the work precisely (e.g., editors, edition, volume number, page numbers, urls)
- Publishing information (e.g., publisher, date)

***The CGCC Writing Center has several handouts and books that can help you master MLA and APA citation styles. Please ask a tutor if you need help finding these resources!***

**Note:**

Do not pad your Works Cited or References page with sources not actually cited in your research paper. If you feel your Works Cited listing does not adequately represent the amount of material you actually used in your research, ask your instructor about an additional listing called "Works Consulted." This will allow you to list the material you researched but did not actually cite in your research paper. However, it is important to initially select a topic which provides you an adequate number of sources to use and cite per the minimum requirements.