Tuesday’s Tidbits

The Three Parts of an Essay

Have you ever been asked to write an essay and not known where to start? If so, here’s some help. A short or 5-paragraph essay will have three main parts:

1. **Introduction**: The introduction should be one paragraph, and it should introduce the topic and main idea and preview the rest of your essay. The introduction will also include your thesis statement. The other sentences should present your topic, create interest, and provide necessary background information. Your thesis statement should go at the end of the paragraph.

2. **Body**: The body is generally made up of three paragraphs. Each paragraph supports, develops or adds detail to your main idea. Each body paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence. The topic sentence, which is typically near the beginning of your paragraph, serves as the thesis statement for the paragraph, and the rest of the sentences provide supporting details for your paragraph’s main idea.

3. **Conclusion**: The conclusion is one paragraph. It summarizes the body paragraphs and concludes the essay. The first sentence restates the thesis. The second and third sentences summarize the essay’s subpoints. Finally, the fourth sentence leaves the reader with an interesting final impression.

Making an outline for the paper will make writing it easier. An outline for this type of essay will look like this:

I. Introduction: states the main idea
II. Body Paragraph: first detail
III. Body Paragraph: second detail
IV. Body Paragraph: third detail
V. Conclusion: summary

If you’re not sure what a thesis statement is and how long a paragraph should be, here is some information about these two important parts of your essay.

**Thesis Statement**

The thesis statement is a sentence that summarizes the main point of your essay and previews your supporting points. The thesis statement is important because it guides your readers from the beginning of your essay by telling them the main idea and the points you will be making.

Generally, the thesis statement is the final sentence of your introduction. Sometimes, it is a good idea to use two sentences. For example, you might identify your main point in one sentence and then identify your supporting points in a second sentence. Other times, your thesis statement will only be one sentence. Either is acceptable, but remember that you need a clear thesis statement at the end of your introduction so that your reader understands your main point and knows what to expect from the rest of your essay.

**Paragraph**

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic and follows this format:

- Put only one main idea per paragraph.
- Aim for three to five or more sentences per paragraph.
- Include on each page about two handwritten or three typed paragraphs.
- Make your paragraphs proportional to your paper. Since paragraphs do less work in short papers, have short paragraphs for short papers and longer paragraphs for longer papers.
- If you have a few very short paragraphs, think about whether they are really parts of a larger paragraph—and can be combined—or whether you can add details to support each point and thus make each into a more fully developed paragraph.

Understanding the structure and parts of an essay helps you write better papers. And, while a longer essay will have more body paragraphs, it should still begin with an introductory paragraph and end with a concluding paragraph. Please ask your instructor, a tutor, or the librarian for help if you need it.