

The Body

OK, you have your topic. You know what you are going to write about, at least in theory, and you've developed a thesis statement. You may not like your thesis statement, but it works and will get you started. What's next?

Logic and sequence say the introduction. However, I have had more success teaching my students to write from the inside out—that is, at least for the first several times, to write the essay's body before its introduction. To do this, you will need to understand *organization*.

Organization entails the way you put your essay together and how you arrange its content. That's the subject of this section.

The Five-Paragraph Organization

Most beginning essays span five paragraphs (introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion). You can develop a good essay—not too long or not too short—in three body paragraphs, but there is nothing sacred about the number three. You could write a four-paragraph, or a six-paragraph, or a twenty-paragraph essay and employ the same techniques.

I'm going to offer you several ways to structure your essays, beginning with a very simple structure and moving on to some that are more complex. The simple structure will help you if you are just beginning to write essays, but the concept will also help more experienced students write a short essay or write under a time constraint. If you have to write an essay in thirty-minutes to pass some sort of test, the simple structure will serve you well, although you may not have enough time to complete five paragraphs.

The Simplest Structure

Your first challenge will be to select a topic to address in each body paragraph and write a working thesis. If you've written an academic thesis, its three prongs will be the topics of your three body paragraphs. Perhaps you are writing an essay on courage, and your thesis statement reads as follows:

- People display courage every day when they stand firm in their beliefs, do something hard, or hold their sinful nature in check.

You could begin your introduction by relating an amazing story of courage—a young man rescuing his neighbor from a burning home, for example—then move on to ordinary everyday kinds of courage, and conclude with your thesis statement. Your next three paragraphs could discuss courage as it relates to upholding personal convictions, completing a difficult task, and not responding rashly.

The Simple Structure

A good way to organize your body paragraphs is to employ the acronym SEE, which stands for Statement, Explanation, or Example. Begin with a topic sentence, follow it with two SEEs, and end with a clincher. Whenever you feel at a loss for words, you can use this form for inspiration. But remember, this is just to get you started. As you become more comfortable with writing, you will want to exercise your own creativity and move beyond the formula.

I. Topic Sentence

Begin with your topic sentence. It should tie in to your thesis statement (in this case firm convictions) and explain how you will address the topic in your paragraph. In our example you might say, "Ordinary people display courage when they stand firm in their personal convictions."

A. First Statement (S)

Next, make an assertion or statement about your topic sentence. An assertion is a declaration or something you want to prove or discuss. In our example we might say, "Peer pressure sometimes prevents people from listening to their consciences."

1. First Statement Explanation (E) or Example (E)

Follow your assertion or statement with two sentences of explanation. You might develop the statement by expanding on it or explaining it in more detail, offering a story, giving an example, or in the case that follows, making an observation. In discussing courage and peer pressure you might say, "A young person might hear companions spreading false rumors or gossiping about a close friend. Speaking out, even graciously, takes fortitude."

B. Second Statement (S)

After you've developed your first assertion as much as you like (two sentences at a minimum), follow it with another statement that relates to your topic. Pay attention to your transition to make sure this statement connects with your first. You could say, "Alternatively, people might face the temptation to set aside their standards."

1. Second Statement Explanation (E) or Example (E)

Just as you did for your first assertion, follow with at least two more sentences of evidence, details, or examples. In our example, "If friends want to watch a movie filled with violence or inappropriate content, the person faces a quandary. Should he go along with the group and watch or affirm his standards and leave?"

II. Clincher Statement

Finally, conclude your paragraph with a final or closing statement that reflects the topic sentence. For example, "By exhibiting courage, people stay true to their beliefs and principles."



The simple structure is a good place to start because it contains all of the elements of a well-structured paragraph: topic and clincher sentences, transitions, and on-topic discussion. It is the simplest; it is not always the best. Use it when you're under time pressure, when you are experiencing brain freeze, or for a first draft—or even a pre-draft when you just want to get words down on the paper. For better and more elegant essays, you need more. Read on.

Showing vs. Telling



Most English books tell you that you need evidence and support for your paragraph topics, and this is true, but what exactly is *support*? I find it easier to think in terms of *telling* and *showing*. Telling is exactly what it sounds like—you tell your reader what you are going to talk about. Showing, on the other hand, demonstrates and expands your point. It creates a picture or impression in your reader's brain. What is the problem with the simple structure demonstrated above? It is almost all telling. It needs some showing. Here are some examples of the difference between telling and showing.

<i>Telling</i>	<i>Showing</i>
The Internet makes shopping convenient. (informative)	I wanted to buy a conch shell to use as a prop when I taught <i>Lord of the Flies</i> . I could have searched local shops, probably in vain, or made long distant phone calls to other parts of the country. Instead, I fired up Google, typed in “conch shell sales,” and ten minutes later a business in Florida wrapped, shipped, and prepared to deliver the shell right to my mailbox.
My dog was scared. (descriptive)	Tora's tail uncurled and her ears drooped. She backed up behind the table leg, bared her teeth, and growled softly.
Smoking destroys your health. (persuasive)	If you are a teenager and you continue to smoke for the rest of your life, you have a fifty-fifty chance of dying from tobacco-related diseases. Even if you beat the odds, you still have a 25 percent chance of sacrificing 21 years of your life.

By all means, you need to *tell* in your essay, but you also need to *show*. To say this another way, you need to make statements and assertions, but you also need to back them up with support or evidence. Your primary asserting, your *telling* occurs in your thesis. The rest of your essay responds to the reader's unspoken question (Read with your best British accent.), “I say, Old Man, you'll have to convince me.” That takes showing.

Evidence and Support—Showing

So what can you use for support in your essay? Plenty. Let's look at some ideas.

Evidence Examples

Besides developing a thesis statement, the skill my students find most difficult when learning to write elegant essays is providing evidence and support for their points. Therefore, I thought I would provide a few examples of what students might generate and how they could improve their body paragraphs.

Example One

Many people in today's society depend on the Internet's information. A lot of people read the news off Internet sites such as CNN.com. The Internet is more efficient because there are many newspapers that do not cover everything that happens. On the Internet people can search many sites for a variety of news—current or archived. People might find different types of information on the Internet, including facts, opinions, how-tos, and even information on people. The Internet bursts with information.

This paragraph is well-structured. It includes a topic sentence that relates to the thesis statement, several body sentences, and a clincher to wrap it up. It's grammatically correct and thoughtful. However, it is almost all telling and somewhat redundant. The student is telling me about the Internet's information; he is not showing me how to obtain that information. He has no evidence to back up his claims. Here are some ideas (in italics) for additions:

Today, people depend on the Internet for information. A lot of people get their news directly from Internet sites, such as CNN.com. This offers advantages over newspapers because newspapers do not include all of the news and are not always current. *A while back I wanted to know the results of the special election in my district, and I did not have access to a newspaper. I powered up my Internet, typed "Concord California local election results" into a search engine, and within seconds the results appeared on my screen.* The Internet contains other types of information as well, including facts, opinions, and even information about people. *If you type a person's phone number into Google, you will learn his full name and address, complete with a map and driving directions to his home. You can even view a satellite photo of his home.* The Internet bursts with information.

Example Two

Before we get too excited about human cloning, we need to recognize the many dangers involved in the process. Before scientists even implant the clone in the surrogate mother, there are difficulties. Those who do get their fling at living have serious health issues and defects as well. Not counting the aging problem, clones still do not have it easy. Serious health impairments result. Clones' problems include underdeveloped body organs and immune systems, diabetes, anemia, skin infections, blood vessel abnormalities, grossly enlarged placentas and umbilical cords, fatty livers, hypertension, misshapen heads, and lung disease. Would we really want to curse a human baby with these defects?



This student added her own evidence, and it brought her paragraph to life:

Before we get too excited about human cloning, we need to recognize the many dangers involved in the process. Before scientists even implant the clone in the surrogate mother, there are difficulties. *Cloning is a difficult process with a very low success rate. Only two percent of the cloned animals are suitable for implantation. Of those two percent, 97 out of 100 do not survive. Whether human or animal, that is still an enormous figure. If those are human cloned babies, they are individual people who are dying, failing to get a chance to live like other people.* Those who do get their fling at living have serious health issues and defects as well. *For starters, they age early. Dolly was suffering from arthritis at the age of five years, whereas arthritis usually strikes sheep of advanced ages, like nine or ten.* Not counting the aging problem, clones still do not have it easy. *Many cloned animals have health issues including Dolly, Second Chance, Noah, and a little six-month old lamb with a bad problem of hyperventilating.* Clones' problems include underdeveloped body organs and immune systems, diabetes, anemia, skin infections, blood vessel abnormalities, grossly enlarged placentas and umbilical cords, fatty livers, hypertension, misshapen heads, and lung disease. Would we really want to curse a human baby with these defects?

The difference between the simple example introduced a few pages ago (SEE) and this one is the support. The more support or evidence or proof you can bring to your essay, the more you will convince your audience that you are informed and worth listening to. Instead of *telling* readers to believe something, to take you on faith, you *show* them the evidence and lead them to make up their own minds. Let's look at some ways to do this.

More Evidence & Support Examples



There are at least eight ways to show and support:

1. Examples—a specific instance
2. Personal Experience—something that has actually happened to you that sheds light on the topic
3. Statistics—numbers, percents, and data
4. Research/Testimony—a quote or summary of an authority or specialist's views
5. Observation—a judgment or inference; logical reasoning
6. Description—word pictures that bring your idea to life
7. Anecdote—a story that relates to or exemplifies the point you are trying to make
8. Analogy—a comparison to something else to clarify your reasoning

To illustrate the eight options for body evidence and support, several examples for body paragraphs follow. These same techniques could be used for *showing* in all elegant essays.

Example

An example is a specific illustration of your point that occurs outside your personal experience. It could be the experience of a friend or relative, or it could be something you hear or read about.

One benefit television offers is immediate access to worldwide news. Broadcasts allow people to learn about events happening all around the globe. On Christmas Day in 2004, while most people were wrapped up in the events of the day or unwrapping their presents, television reports shared some unsettling news: In one of the worst natural disasters in recent history, a tsunami had roared across the shores of several Southeast Asian countries, killing thousands. In short order, news shows reported the devastation, which allowed Americans to drop to their knees in prayer and open their pocketbooks in tangible support. The images broadcast on television allowed people to see the effects of the tsunami and quickly help the sufferers of this dreadful disaster.

Personal Experience

Personal experience is similar to an example. However, examples report other people's experience, while personal experience conveys your own. If you use personal experience as support for your essay, please remember two things: First, it is perfectly fine to lapse into first person point of view and use personal pronouns (such as *I, me, my, we, our, us*) while relating your details. Second, personal experience must be true. It would be highly unethical to fabricate information and write about it as if it really happened and damage your credibility.

It's hard to master writing body paragraphs. Not only do students have to remember a variety of techniques, they have to think. Thinking is arduous work. In my twenty-plus years of teaching composition in one form or another, I've rarely seen students who master these techniques immediately. Instead, they have to practice. Then they have to practice some more. Finally, one day it all comes together, and their writing becomes a joy to read.

Statistics

Statistics, the use of figures and numbers to make a point, can effectively support your essay's topics. However, you need to be aware of several potential difficulties. First, any statistics you use need to come from reliable sources. You will need to exercise discernment to determine whether or not you may trust the statistics. Second, statistics can be overwhelming, especially if you use too many. Readers might get lost in a sea of numbers. After you use statistics, be sure to apply them or comment on them. Tell your readers what you want them to learn from your use of the statistics.

Television, especially unmonitored or excessive viewing, can harm children's development. Many shows, even those aired during the evening family hour, contain unnecessary and extreme violence. According to the Parents Television Council, by the time the average American child reaches his eighteenth birthday, his mind will have been polluted with 200,000 violent images. Additionally, he will have witnessed 8,000 brutal murders. This is too much. How many children have personally witnessed even one murder in real life? Very few. Parents must protect innocent young minds from television's refuse.

Please note that when you cite statistics or expert testimony, the reference needs to be cited in a *Works Cited* page. The citation used in the above paragraph would look like this:

"TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time Broadcast TV." *Parents Television Council*. N.d. Web. 30 Jun. 2010.

Observation

Observations might also be called logical reasoning. Beginning with a premise or set of facts, you build a case for your arguments by reasoning or making inferences. Words that frequently occur with this type of evidence or support include *might* or *could*. The above paragraph illustrating the use of statistics might have ended this way if it included an observation:

Children who watch violence might imitate it. With seared consciences, they might not be able to discern right actions from wrong actions.

Generally, observation that contains speculation, like the above example, is the weakest kind of support. Think twice before you use it.

Research or Testimony

Oftentimes it's helpful to find an expert who can lend weight to your arguments. What is an *expert*? Loosely defined, it is someone who can be trusted to speak with authority on the topic or someone with experience in the field. These days, the Internet abounds with research and expert testimony. As with statistics, you will need to exercise discernment to determine whether or not the testimony is from an authority or a dependable source.

Scientists play god when they engage in embryonic stem cell research because they determine who has the right to live and who will die. Just because an embryo has not developed to the point of birth does not mean it is not a human being. According to Dr. Francis J. Beckwith, fellow of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, "The unborn—from zygote to blastocyst to embryo to fetus—is the same being, the same substance, that develops into an adult." If it is wrong to kill an adult, it is equally wrong to kill an embryo, even if the embryo's stem cells might save another's life.

Beckwith, Francis J. PhD. "What Would Reagan Do?" *National Review Online*. 27 July 2004. 20 Feb. 2006. <<http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/beckwith200407270012.asp>>.

Description

Unlike the written word, photographs and movies portray vivid images that make an impact. Writing, especially descriptive writing, strives to create an image in the reader's mind that makes the same impact. Good descriptions contain imagery and appeal to the five senses.

Smoking causes lung cancer and a host of other life-shortening diseases. Years of inhaling tar and nicotine produce cancerous lungs: black, shriveled, and stunted. They look like burned cookies left in the oven so long their edges crisp and curl until they resemble charcoal lumps. It's no wonder victims of lung cancer lose weight and cough up blood.

Anecdote/Story

Stories and anecdotes bring essays to life; however, they must be true stories. As with personal experience, it is highly unethical to invent details and pass them off as true.

Bev Holzrichter owes her life to the Internet. During foaling season in 2005, Ms.

Holzrichter entered her horse barn and felt the wrath of a mare trying to protect her colt. Thankfully, friends from around the world watched the accident on webcams installed to allow the global community to share the miracle of foaling season. The Charlotte, Iowa, Rescue Squad received calls from Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, and help arrived quickly. Not only does the Internet foster communication, it can make the difference between life and death.

Analogy

An analogy is a way to compare two dissimilar items or ideas. By linking something known to something less familiar, an analogy creates a likeness and consequently, understanding. One of my students thought of the following brilliant analogy:

Salary caps allow fair competition in sports because they limit the aggregate amount of money any one team can spend on its players' salaries. This prevents any team with an abundance of funds from hiring all superstars. Salary caps are like trips to the gas station: A person pays the attendant \$40 and proceeds to pump his gas. When he reaches his limit, the pump shuts down. In the same way, when a team reaches its salary cap, it can't spend any more money on players. Owners must budget their payroll carefully, which creates a leveling effect and promotes fair competition in the league.

All of the examples above can be profitably used for narrative or descriptive, informative or expository, and persuasive essays. Additionally, they may be combined, often in the same paragraph. But don't lose sight of your point. Remember, the purpose of evidence and support is to uphold and prove your thesis statement. Argue your premise, describe your event, or explain your process. Use these techniques for *showing*: for emphasis, proof, and backup.

Showing vs. Telling

Telling	Showing
Dad is very funny.	
Mom sometimes forgets things.	
The cat was afraid of Tora, the very brave dog.	
[Your favorite sport] is fun.	

Evidence & Support for Essays

1. Examples
2. Personal Experience
3. Statistics
4. Research/Testimony
5. Observation
6. Description
7. Anecdote
8. Analogy

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 3a: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: courage, a gift, women in the military, education

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 3b: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: courage, a gift, women in the military, education

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:
