

Assessing and Commenting on Essay Structure

Essay Elements

What to comment on/ look for as you read....

Introduction

<p>A good introduction piques the reader’s attention with a problem statement, gives readers a sense of how others are discussing this topic and why the discussion is of value in relation to the writer’s key idea and illustrates a “roadmap” of the argumentative direction that the paper will take.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction should begin with a narrowly focused concession, a paradox, or with a short anecdote that identifies a problem. Obvious facts, dictionary definitions, and clichéd overgeneralizations (“Throughout world history...,” “All women know...” etc.) are off-limits. • The student should write to an identifiable audience. Who is to be convinced? Why should these people be interested? Exactly what is the paper about? When students write introductions, they enter a scholarly conversational “context” and need to establish their place in the conversation. What is the common thinking on the topic? What is being discussed? • In shorter papers, the roadmap comes before the thesis statement, and in longer papers, the roadmap comes directly after the thesis. The roadmap describes the writer’s method for approaching the topic, refers to major sections of the paper and details the relationships between them. The roadmap is NOT a list but rather an explanation of the relationship between parts of the paper.
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Thesis Statement

<p>The thesis statement is typically found at the end of the introduction. Thesis statements should reveal a tension, a paradox, an interesting question, or a concern. Sophisticated thesis statements – thesis statements that effectively capture tension - consist of three parts and address what, how, and why you are approaching your topic in a particular way. In order to effectively contain such information, thesis statements should generally be complex sentences. The thesis statement should NEVER be a list of ideas or of pieces of evidence. The “list” thesis encourages students to dwell in the five-paragraph essay form, a form that is not appropriate for college writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the thesis statement critically. Does it state more than the obvious? Does it reveal an interesting question or tension? Is it argumentative? Does it predict how the writer will support this argument? • Examine the thesis statement’s sentence structure. Does the sentence structure effectively support the thesis’s content? Would a subordinated structure better suit the ideas? • Look for the three parts of a strong thesis statement – the “what,” the “how,” and the “why.”
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Additional Background Information

<p>Longer papers, like research papers, often require more than one paragraph of introductory material. Thus, after the introduction, roadmap, and thesis statement, the student might include paragraphs that define important terms, introduce key concepts, summarize information to which he or she will refer throughout the paper, or give any other important background information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each introductory paragraph should begin with a controlling topic sentence that helps the reader understand the paragraph’s function. • While additional introductory paragraphs may not be argumentative, they should still directly relate to the paper’s thesis statement.
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Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences

<p>Every body paragraph should begin with a clear, argumentative topic sentence. The topic sentence should preview the content of the paragraph within the context of the thesis statement. Topic sentences should always contain an argument and should be in the writer's voice (rather than evidence). Concluding sentences should answer the "so what" question as to why that information in the paragraph was pertinent to the thesis or the argument.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If a paragraph's topic sentence is not immediately obvious, look for sentences within the paragraph that contain information appropriate for a topic sentence.• Perform a "topic sentence backwards outline." On a separate sheet of paper, chart the first sentence of each paragraph. Do the sentences support the logical development of the paper's argument? If not, does the illogic reflect paragraph content or paragraph order?
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Development and Unity

<p>All paragraphs should be organized logically and in an accessible way. After the topic sentence, the writer should develop his or her argument by using evidence (a fact, a paraphrase, a quotation, or a summary) from source material. In addition to presenting the source material, the writer should analyze the evidence in terms of his or her argument. The writer's analysis of evidence should relate to the paragraph's topic sentence and, in turn, to the thesis statement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reverse outline to assess each paragraph's topic sentences and the relationships between paragraphs. Examine each paragraph and ask: "What is the point of this paragraph?" "Why is this paragraph located at this point in the paper?" and "How does this paragraph relate to the thesis?" Take notes in the margins. Examine the list of descriptions that you made for each paragraph and ensure that you understand the logic behind each paragraph's contribution to the argument.• Does the evidence detailed in each paragraph supplement the paragraph's topic sentence? Is the evidence relevant and accurate?
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Use of Evidence

<p>Evidence needs to be presented within a proper framework. Students should use signal phrases to introduce their outside sources (regardless of whether the information will be presented in a quotation, a paraphrase, or a summary). Signal phrases name the source's author and provide context both about the source and about the way in which the source relates to the argument.</p> <p>Students should avoid using only one source per paragraph. In a fully developed scholarly discussion, writers weave multiple sources into each paragraph. By doing so, writers effectively enter into an informed conversation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The reader should be able to move seamlessly from the writer's words to the words of the writer's sources. That means that the writer should use signal phrases, should adapt other people's language to fit his or her style (using paraphrase, summary, quotations, or partial quotations), and should analyze the evidence within the context of his or her argument.• Are there a variety of sources used for each claim? If not, the writer could be relying too heavily on one source and may not be making an original argument.• Does the writer use quotations sparingly or as a substitute for lack of understanding?
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Conclusion

<p>The conclusion should begin with a reference to the thesis statement, but since the essay should have given its readers new and interesting ways to think about a problem, the concluding remarks should be different - more reflective, more developed, or more carefully nuanced - than the original. The main points or turns in the argument should be revisited as the writer examines the implications of the writer's argument: So what? Why does the argument matter?</p> <p>The conclusion is an appropriate place to admit limitations to the argument or research process. Strong conclusions end with provocative claims about the paper's implications or with suggestions about how the paper's implications can be extended into future discussions.</p> <p>Check to be sure all implications follow from the facts and arguments presented. Do not introduce new ideas or arguments in the conclusion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The thesis statement should NOT be repeated verbatim. Examine the way that the writer reintroduces his or her thesis claim.• Does the conclusion follow logically from the argument and evidence presented? Be sure new arguments are not being proposed in the conclusion.• Look at the implications. Are they convincing? Do they conclude the paper in an interesting and provocative way?
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Mechanics

<p>In properly edited papers, grammar, punctuation, and spelling are all correct. Sentence structure should be grammatically and syntactically correct. Pagination, titles, font, and margin size should all meet the instructor's expectations.</p> <p>Citations should follow proper formatting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look for patterns in grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. Can you turn repeated errors (like subject/verb disagreement or apostrophe errors) into teachable opportunities?• Ensure that every quotation, paraphrase, and summary is cited properly, both in the text and in the works cited or bibliography.
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Style

<p>Strong papers are stylized in clear, interesting, and effective ways that promote reader comprehension and highlight relationships between ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sentence length should be varied. Look for proper (and improper) use of subordination. How would sentences look different with subordination?• Look at verbs. Does the student use active voice and clear, powerful verbs?• Identify redundant sentence patterns or elements.
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