

The Organization of an Essay

The following explains the traditional way to organize an expository essay that is trying to make a point about some topic and to provide supporting material for that point. This method of organizing may vary slightly depending on the specific type of essay that you are writing.

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Title of Essay

The diagram illustrates the organization of an essay. It consists of five main sections arranged vertically. The first section is a box labeled 'Title of Essay'. The second section is a box containing three horizontal lines, representing the thesis statement. The third, fourth, and fifth sections are boxes representing the first, second, and third body paragraphs, respectively. Each section is connected to a descriptive text block on the right by a horizontal arrow pointing left.

← The **title of the essay** reveals the general topic of the paper and gives some indication of the particular point being made about that topic.

← The **thesis statement** goes here. This is one sentence which summarizes the main point that the entire essay is making.

← The **first body paragraph** will state and explain the first reason in support of your thesis.

← The **second body paragraph** will state and explain the second reason in support of your thesis.

← The **third body paragraph** will state and explain the third reason in support of your thesis.

← The **concluding paragraph** begins with a repeat of the thesis statement but with slightly different wording from the first version of the thesis statement.

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The Introductory Paragraph: A Closer Look

The purpose of the introductory paragraph in an essay is to “introduce” the reader to your topic in a gradual and logical manner. The introductory paragraph gently “eases” into the topic so that the reader can follow your train of thought and be better prepared for what you will be saying later in the essay. The introductory paragraph usually ends with the **thesis statement**, which is one sentence that sums up the one, main point that your essay is making about its topic.

Here are some specifications about the typical introductory paragraph:

- It begins with an indentation (as do all the paragraphs in your essay)
- It is not too long or too short --usually about four to five sentences long.
- It should begin with an “attention grabber,” i.e., something that will capture and keep the reader’s attention and make him want to continue reading your essay.

This device could be:

- a. an interesting or unusual little-known fact about your topic
 - b. a thought-provoking rhetorical question
 - c. a brief narrative (a little story) which illustrates a point related to your topic
- It begins with a rather general tone and gradually gets more specific toward the end.
 - It usually ends with your thesis statement, which might also contain a brief summary of the supporting reasons (often three or more) for your thesis. This
 - thesis statement should contain some of the same important words as the title of your essay.

The following is a sample introductory paragraph that demonstrates the points mentioned above:

The Need for Parental Controls of TV Programs ← Title

Statistics show that there are more television sets in America than bathtubs. The average American home has at least two TVs. Something else that the average American home has is children—and often very young, impressionable children. This combination of children and television can be good (as with educational programming like *National Geographic*), but it can also be quite damaging (as with programs depicting excessive sex and violence like *CSI: Special Victims Unit*). Clearly there needs to be some type of regulation of what young children see on their TVs at home. Parents should definitely monitor, screen, and control the types of TV programs that their young children watch.

Thesis Statement

(The essay would then go on to present at least three specific reasons why the author of the essay feels that parents should control what their children watch on TV. Each reason would be fully explained in its own paragraph, and therefore the body of the essay would contain three paragraphs.)

The Body of the Essay

The following information about the body of an essay applies to all types of essays in which you are trying to make a point about something and support it.

The body of the essay is the part between the introduction and the conclusion. It is the longest and most important part of the essay, because its purpose is to provide support for your thesis statement. This support can come in the form of examples, facts or statistics, short narratives about the personal experience of the author, or simply more details explaining what you mean.

Usually the body of an essay contains at least three paragraphs and often more. Each paragraph discusses one idea that supports your thesis statement. For example, if you have four main ideas to support your thesis statement, then four paragraphs will be in the body of your essay – one separate paragraph to discuss each idea. These supporting paragraphs can be as long or as short as necessary, but the average length is usually about five or six sentences.

Your body paragraphs should be arranged in increasing order of importance. That means to begin by explaining the supporting idea that is only slightly important and end with the supporting idea that is VERY important.

When you begin each new body paragraph, you should use a transition, which could be one word, a phrase, or even a full sentence. A transitional word would be something like *First, Secondly, Thirdly, Next, or Finally*. Sometimes slightly longer phrases can be used such as *In the first place, On the other hand, or By contrast*.

NOTE: The first transitional word or phrase would be used at the very beginning of the second body paragraph and would appear at the start of the first sentence of each body paragraph after that one until you get to the concluding paragraph.

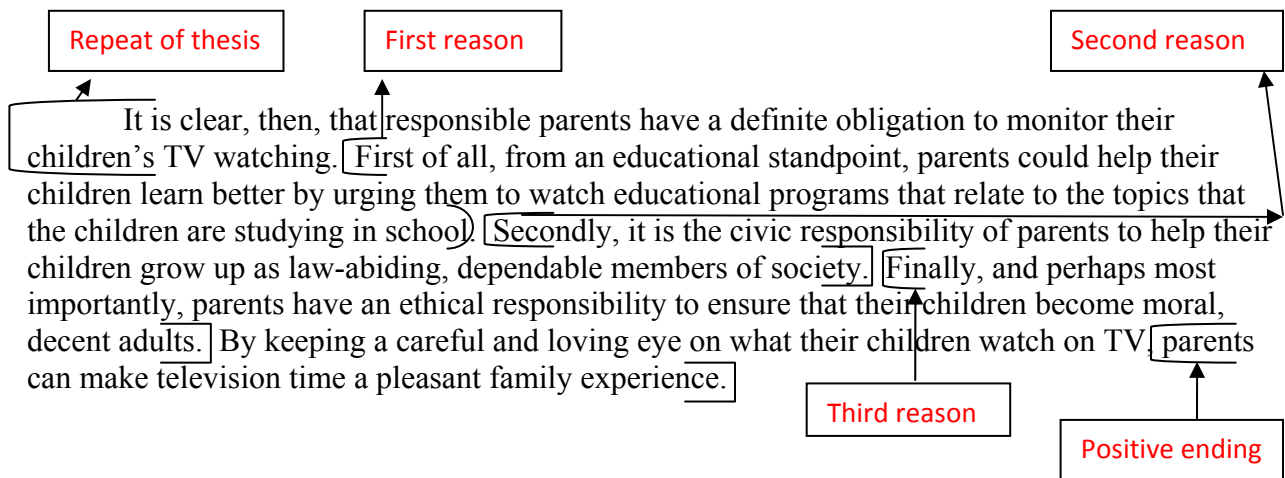
The purpose of the transition is to remind the reader of your paper about the main idea of the previous paragraph before he begins reading the new paragraph. Do not use a transition at the end of one paragraph to tell the reader what the next paragraph is going to be about. In other words, a properly used transition would remind the reader of what has already been said in the previous paragraph, not what is going to be said in the next paragraph. It's a review of the past, not a prediction of the future.

The Concluding Paragraph of an Essay

The concluding paragraph of an essay is almost as important and as carefully structured as the introductory paragraph. Here are some general pointers about a properly written concluding paragraph:

- The first line should be indented (just like all the other paragraphs).
- The concluding paragraph should not be too long or too short; the average length is about four or five sentences.
- The concluding paragraph should begin with a repeat of the thesis statement (main idea) of the essay but with slightly different wording from the original thesis statement in the introduction.
- The main purpose of the concluding paragraph is to sum up the major ideas of the essay by reviewing the important points that have been made and by reminding the reader what the main point (the thesis statement) of the essay was.
- No new information or new ideas should be in the conclusion.
- If possible, the concluding paragraph should end on a positive, upbeat note.
- It is not necessary or desirable to begin the concluding paragraph with the trite phrase, “In conclusion,…” There are better phrases to use to imply that this is the concluding paragraph of the essay.

Here is a sample concluding paragraph that exemplifies the above traits:



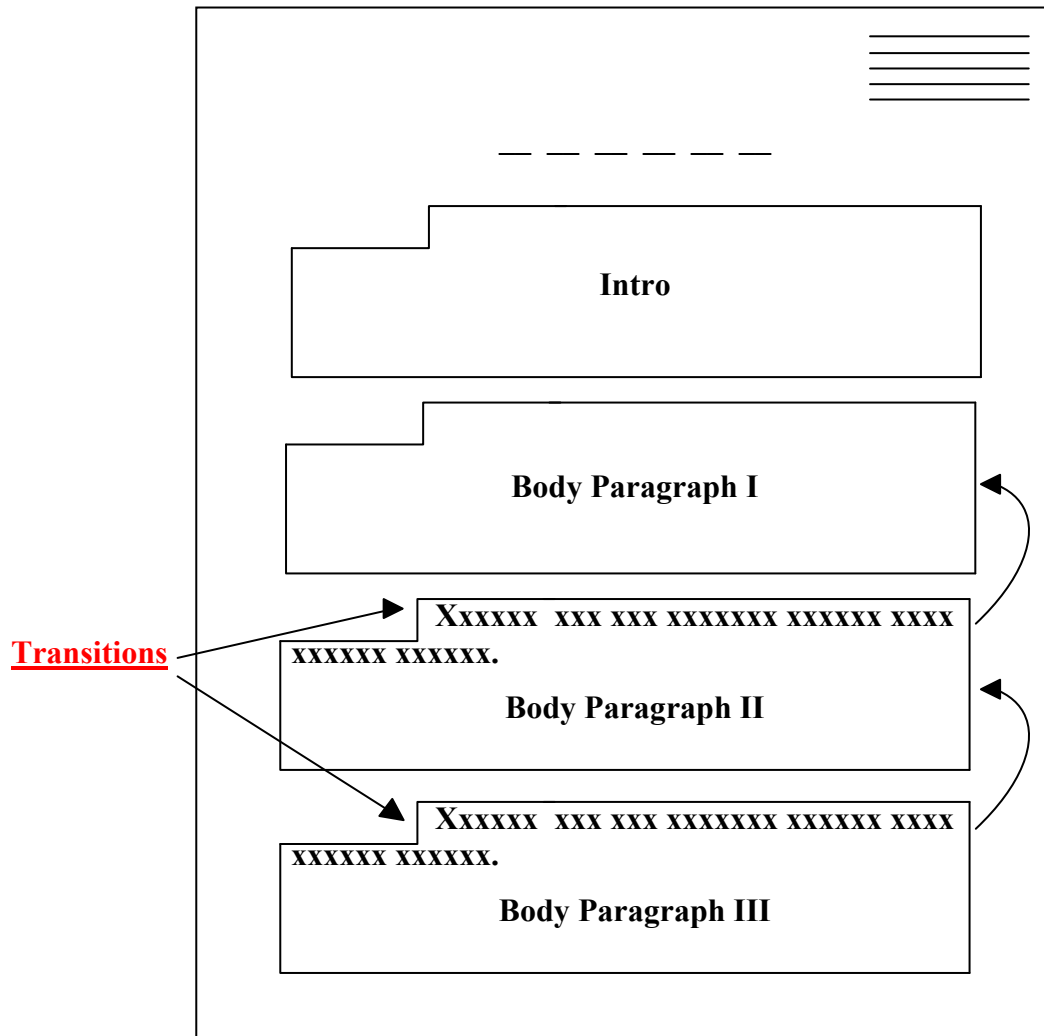
Trip Through Transitions

A transition is moving from one place to another. In writing, we try to make transitions between paragraphs so that the reader of our paper can “move” smoothly from one idea to another. The transitions help show how the various ideas are related to each other.

A transition is usually placed at the START of a new paragraph in the body of the paper. Do not place it at the end of the previous paragraph; it goes at the very beginning of the NEW paragraph.

The transition could be anything from a single word to an entire sentence. Many times, transitional phrases are already well known, such as *Consequently*, *On the other hand*, *In contrast*, *By the same token*, *Along the same lines*, and others. At other times, you will have to create an entirely new sentence in order to make your transitional thought.

Here is a diagram to show where transitional phrases usually go in the average essay:



A Trip Through Transitions

1. Additional information of the same nature as what has just been given.

and	Furthermore,
Similarly,	Just as . . . , so also
Likewise,	Also,
In the same way,	In addition, . . .
Moreover,	By the same token,
	Along the same lines,

2. Opposite or contradictory information from what has just been given

but	In spite of this, . . .
However,	Nevertheless, . . .
Although	Nonetheless, . . .
On the other hand,	On the contrary,
	By contrast (or In contrast, . . .)

3. A choice between two options

or
either . . . or (one of two things or people mentioned)
neither . . . nor (no choice of two things mentioned)
if , then

4. A reason for some occurrence or some course of action

because
by reason of . . .
due to . . .

(Avoid “due to the fact that” Just use because instead.)

5. Coming to or drawing a conclusion; “finishing up.”

then	so
therefore	We see, then, that
thus	(Avoid “In conclusion” It’s too stuffy and artificial.)
hence	Finally, . . .

6. Beginning or just starting to establish main points:

To begin with,	First of all, (primary point)
At first,	Secondly, . . (drop “of all” after <u>first</u>)
Initially,	

7. Words designating a certain time sequence or order:

While

After

Before . . .

During . . .

As

Meantime, (or In the meantime) Meanwhile, . . .

Miscellaneous:

8. To introduce a sudden idea distantly related to what has just been said:

Incidentally,

By the way,

Speaking of

9. To introduce surprising information or more correct or more accurate information.

-- As a matter of fact, . . .

Actually, . . .

In fact, . . .

Creating Sentence-Length Transitions

Sometimes a transition between paragraphs will be a full, complete sentence instead of just one or two words. In this case, the sentence will serve as a smooth “idea bridge” from the old paragraph into the new one.

Here is an example of full-sentence transitions:

Let’s say that you’re writing a paper about the characters in the play *Glass Menagerie*. The first paragraph is about how shy Laura is, but the next paragraph is supposed to talk about how bold Tom can be. Below is a possible transitional sentence to be used between the two paragraphs:

Probably the most important personality trait of Laura
is her extreme shyness.

(This paragraph goes on to give examples and quotations to support
the idea of Laura’s shyness. This entire paragraph is only about Laura’s shyness.)

Although Laura is shy to the extreme, her brother Tom often displays moments
of boldness and brashness. } Transitional sentence

Transitional phrase

(This paragraph talks only about Tom’s boldness. It gives examples
and quotes to support the idea that Tom is bold.)

A full-sentence transition just means that you must write an entire sentence which somehow “reminds” the reader of the main idea of the preceding paragraph. Like all other transitions, this transitional sentence goes at the beginning of the NEW paragraph.