

## WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Structure and organization are integral components of an effective persuasive essay. No matter how intelligent the ideas, a paper lacking a strong introduction, well-organized body paragraphs and an insightful conclusion is not an effective paper.

### The Introduction

Simply enough, the introductory paragraph introduces the argument of your paper. A well-constructed introductory paragraph immediately captures a reader's interest and gives appropriate background information about the paper's topic. Such a paragraph might include a brief summary of the ideas to be discussed in body of the paper as well as other information relevant to your paper's argument. The most important function of the introductory paragraph, however, is to present a clear statement of the paper's argument. This sentence is your paper's thesis. Without a thesis, it is impossible for you to present an effective argument. The thesis sentence should reflect both the position that you will argue and the organizational pattern with which you will present and support your argument.

A useful way to think about the construction of a thesis sentence is to view it in terms of stating both the "what" and the "how" of the paper's argument. The "what" is simply the basic argument in your paper: what exactly are you arguing? The "how" is the strategy you will use to present this argument. The following are helpful questions for you to consider when formulating a thesis sentence:

- What is the argument that I am trying to convince the reader to accept?
- How exactly do I expect to convince the reader that this argument is sound?

Once you have answered these questions, the next step is to synthesize these answers into a single thesis sentence, or, if necessary, two thesis sentences.

**For example:** You want to convince your reader that the forces of industry did not shape American foreign policy from the late 19th century through 1914, and you plan to do this by showing that there were other factors which were much more influential in shaping American foreign policy. Both of these elements can be synthesized into a thesis sentence:

Fear of foreign influence in the Western hemisphere, national pride, and contemporary popular ideas concerning both expansion and foreign peoples had significantly more influence on American foreign policy than did the voices of industrialists.

This sentence shows the position you will argue and also sets up the organizational pattern of your paper's body.

### The Body

The body of your paper contains the actual development of your paper's argument. Each body paragraph presents a single idea or set of related ideas that provides support for your paper's argument. Each paragraph addresses one key aspect of your thesis and brings the reader closer to accepting the validity of your paper's argument. Because each body paragraph should be a step in your argument -a link in your chain of reasoning- you need to be very mindful of the overall organization of your body paragraphs.

The first step in writing an effective body paragraph is the first sentence of this paragraph, the topic sentence. Just as the thesis sentence holds together your essay, a topic sentence is the glue binding each individual body paragraph. A body paragraph's topic sentence serves two main purposes: it introduces the content of the paragraph and the next step of your argument. It is important to keep in mind that the goal

of the topic sentence is to advance your paper's argument, not just to describe the content of the paragraph.

**For example:** The first part in your thesis on page two states that fear of foreign influence in the Western Hemisphere had more influence on American foreign policy than did industry. Thus, you need to elaborate on this point in your body paragraphs.

An effective topic sentence for one of these paragraphs could be:

American fear of foreign influence was a key factor in the United States' actions in the Spanish-American War. Subsequent body paragraphs might offer further evidence for the idea presented in this body paragraph.

A good way to test the strength of both your topic sentences and your argument as a whole is to construct an outline of your paper using only your paper's thesis statement and topic sentences. This outline should be a logical overview of your paper's argument; all of your paper's topic sentences should work together to support your thesis statement.

### **The Conclusion**

A basic purpose of your paper's concluding paragraph is both to restate the paper's argument and to restate how you have supported this argument in the body of the paper. However, your conclusion should not simply be a copy of your introduction. The conclusion draws together the threads of the paper's argument and shows where the argument of your paper has gone. An effective conclusion gives the reader reasons for bothering to read your paper. One of the most important functions of this paragraph is to bring in fresh insight. Some possible questions to consider when writing your conclusion are:

- What are some real world applications of this paper's argument?
- Why is what I am writing about important?
- What are some of the questions that this paper's argument raises?
- What are the implications of this paper's argument?

While the organization and structure described in this handout are necessary components of an effective persuasive essay, keep in mind that writing itself is a fluid process. There are no steadfast rules that you need to adhere to as you write. Simply because the introduction is the first paragraph in your essay does not mean that you must write this paragraph before any other. Think of the act of writing as an exploration of ideas, and let this sense of exploration guide you as you write your essay.

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