

WRITING BODY PARAGRAPHS

Body Paragraphs support the thesis statement or main idea of an essay, and effective body paragraphs have four features:

1. A clear topic sentence— A topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about. It develops a new but related idea of the central thought of the whole paper. An effective topic sentence should have a definite purpose or point of view and should be the first or second sentence of a paragraph (unless you are synthesizing information or making a deduction in the paragraph, in which case the topic sentence may serve as the conclusion). The topic sentence is usually different than the thesis statement because it introduces a supporting idea related to the overall claim or point of the paper.

Paper Topic Example: How the Civil Rights Movement Affected America

Thesis Statement Example: “Racism in America is less of a problem today than in the past because of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Body Paragraph #1, Topic Sentence Example: “The Civil Rights Movement was a result of increasing tensions between races which heightened in the 1960s .”

2. Strong supporting details-- Because a topic sentence is seldom explicit enough by itself to convey fully the supporting point a writer intends, strong supporting details are needed in every body paragraph. The evidence should inform and explain the topic sentence’s idea or opinion. Where the topic sentence is precise and straight-forward, support is detailed and clear.

Topic sentence example: Benjamin Franklin accomplished many things in his eighty-four years.

Supporting detail example: Franklin gave to the world the stove, bifocals, and the lightning rod.

3. Order—Order is represented through a main idea that is both described in a concise topic sentence and developed via the supporting details. The order of the supporting details should follow the order in which they are mentioned in the topic sentence of a paragraph.

4. Coherence—Coherence is a technique of connecting ideas smoothly and logically. The writer leads the reader clearly and logically from one idea to another in developing thought. Some effective methods of achieving coherence follow.

- By overall planning- Make sure that your paper is organized starting with an introduction using occasional summaries to end one particular train of thought, as well as transitional sentences and paragraphs that link thoughts and conclusions.
- By paragraphing unity and order- Put main ideas in short topic sentences using transitional words such as: therefore, for example, and nevertheless. Organize the paper in a thesis-support or a support-thesis way; in other words, you either present the thesis

and then go on providing support or present support and then give a thesis or overall topic.

- By transitional words and expressions- These are used both between paragraphs and within paragraphs to move from one thought or idea to another.
- By pronoun reference-Use pronouns as substitutes for nouns. Pronouns act as connecting links and can carry the reader back to a thought in the previous sentence.
- By repetition of key words and ideas- Repeating words and ideas can keep the dominant subject in the reader's mind and provide continuity of flow and logical thought.
- By parallel structure, linking similar or related ideas- You can link together similar or logically related ideas that would otherwise be placed in separate statements.
- By maintaining a consistent point of view- Make sure that your point of view is consistent. Avoid unnecessary, sudden, and illogical shifts in point of view.

The following paragraph illustrates a smooth flow of thought from the opening topic sentence through the supporting details. Notice that the purpose is clear in the topic sentence, "Cape Cod is unique," and that the supporting material provides two kinds of logical development: time and cause and effect.

Cape Cod is unique. A peninsula which stands farther out to sea than any other portion of our Atlantic coast, it was created, geologists say, by mile-high glaciers which dropped deposits here in the last Ice Age—about 11,000 years ago. It was then molded for more than 100 centuries by winds, waves, tides and currents. You can see mile after mile of original glacial deposits sliced by the elements into clean-sloping cliffs. Layers, some as distinct as in a cake, show the advances and retreats of the ice. You can even pick up pebbles brought by glaciers from the Laurentian Mountains in Canada.

* Adapted by Melanie Martin from P. Joseph Canavan's Paragraphs and Themes