



Building The Body

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Writing the Body Paragraphs

Most successful academic essays include **a number of developmental (body) paragraphs, each of which develops one of the subpoints that support the thesis.** These paragraphs should make up the bulk of the paper, and their evidence (support) should be very detailed and specific.

Main Elements of Body Paragraphs:

For an academic essay, **start each body paragraph with a topic sentence** which clearly states what supporting point (a reason, a cause, an effect, etc.) the paragraph will develop. Most of all, use transitions or "signposts" to signal the sequence of these supporting points. Often these topic sentences will echo some of the key words associated with the thesis statement. Example:

- **Topic:** Risk of HIV transmission to hospital emergency room personnel.
- **Thesis:** To protect against the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, this hospital should adopt a policy that requires all personnel to wear protective gloves when treating patients.
- **Sample paragraph topic sentence:** First and foremost, a policy of mandatory glove use is justified because we know that gloves are effective: they nearly eliminate the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission significantly.

Signpost/transition: "First and foremost"

Echo words: *policy, gloves, HIV/AIDS*

After the topic sentence, develop each paragraph (that is, prove/illustrate each topic sentence) by providing one or more of the following:

- factual details
- an expanded example
- a series of closely-related short examples
- quotations or paraphrases from recognized experts
- relevant statistics
- logical argument
- a narration or description of a personal experience
- or a combination of these techniques.

Try to end your paragraph with a concluding sentence that directly ties your details or example to your topic sentence or your overall thesis. Do ***not*** end with a sentence repeating your topic sentence.

Above all, body paragraphs must be convincing, and they will be if you add enough specific detail. A paragraph made up of only vague generalizations is never successful. The length of a developmental paragraph does not necessarily determine its success. It must include specific support.

Two sample paragraphs (one vague, one specific):

Topic: Is a college degree less meaningful today than in the past?

Vague

The first area which shows the renewed importance of a college degree today is that of the high technical aspects of society today. As more advances are made in every field concerning living today, jobs are requiring that people obtain more knowledge and technical know-how. A college degree should insure that more knowledge has been obtained; thus the person is more prepared for his job. Again, higher paying jobs such as those available in the professional fields are those same jobs that are more technically orientated. Professional people need to acquire a college degree before they can even consider becoming professionals. Again experience is just not enough.

Specific

First of all, the sheer number of degree candidates today seems to cheapen the accomplishment of working one's way through four years of classes. In my parent's day a diploma was a rare and treasured thing; in the mill towns of west Georgia it was a virtual assurance of financial security. Today, the same area of the state is overrun with degree holders, many of whom work in the same pulpwood mills or textile "sweat shops" as their unschooled parents. The advent of the community college "diploma mills" is largely responsible for this phenomenon; by providing almost everyone a chance for a low-cost education, these colleges have flooded the area with men and women whose degrees make them the rule, rather than the exception, when they begin job-hunting.

Sample Well-Developed Paragraphs (from successful student papers):

Topic: How have changes in the American family structure affected parents? Discuss.

Another clear change is that fathers are becoming more involved with the lives of their children. Many even find happiness in munching homemade cookies with other parents at PTA meetings. Discussing school lunch menus is pure bliss to some. It is the changing attitudes toward traditionally male (and female) roles that have facilitated the coming-out of these "closet mothers," and it deserves a great "Hurrah!" More and more articles and papers are being written on the impact of fathers' active participation in their children's development. There are classes and seminars on not only "How to be better parents" but also on how to be a better father. Fathers are beginning to realize that it's all right to be involved with the PTA, to play with their kids on the weekdays, to help with homework and fix lunches. They find it doesn't hurt to ask if the children have taken their Fred Flintstones and Barney Rubbles, to change the baby's diapers, or give baths.

Topic: What advice would you give to an entering freshman? Discuss.

Granted, the dorm has some surprises, but the real shock comes from the dining hall. Where else can you get the same meatloaf three weeks in a row? To eat in the dining halls you need only two things -- antacid and a very vivid imagination. By the time spring quarter rolls around, you should be addicted to either Roloids or Pepto-Bismol. Both are quite effective and are frequently on sale at Kroger. The vivid imagination is the part I have trouble with. It's quite difficult to believe that they use fresh chicken every day. We have fried chicken on Monday, soggy fried chicken on Tuesday, Italian chicken hidden fathoms deep in tomato sauce on Wednesday, and the ultimate "Chicken Surprise" on Thursday. Friday of course is reserved for fish.

Materials adapted from The Regent's Testing Program web site: <http://www.gsu.edu/~wrrtp>.
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