A Simple Guide to Essay Structure

Writing a scholarly essay means structuring a clear set of ideas into an argument. When you write an essay you are making an argument and supplying evidence for your argument. To do this you must present your argument in the order that makes the most sense to the reader. This is done with proper essay structure. Here are a few steps to follow to create a clear, effective essay.

An essay is composed of three parts:

1. **The Introduction**
2. **The Body Paragraphs**
3. **The Conclusion**

Your “Introduction” is where you introduce the topic of the essay and where you state your argument – your thesis statement. This is normally one paragraph and states your as well as the main points you have to prove your argument is good. The “Body” of your essay is composed of the evidence you are using to support your argument. This is composed of multiple paragraphs. Think of each paragraph as an individual point in your overall argument, make that point and then spend a few sentences explaining it more detail and giving examples. After making all the points in your “Body,” finish with the “Conclusion” which is one paragraph that restates the important parts of your argument and provides you final thoughts on the topic. Below is a breakdown of each section and a text example from one of my old essays.

**INTRODUCTION**

* **Introductory Statement** About Essay (Hook Statement)
* **Briefly present the main arguments/topics of your body paragraph**
  + Introduce Body Paragraph 1
  + Introduce Body Paragraph 2
  + Introduce Body Paragraph X
* **Research Statement/Thesis Statement**

Ex:

The First World War was responsible for the collapse of two empires, the creation of several new nations, and the loss of millions of lives. While claiming a significant place in the history books of numerous countries, the war has historically received less attention in the United States. This is ostensibly due to the United States’ limited period of engagement in the conflict and its muted voice at the Paris Peace Conference. Recent scholarship, however, has taken a new perspective on the United States involvement in the war. Historians Michael Neiberg (*The Path to War*), Adriane Lentz-Smith (*Freedom Struggles*), and Erez Manela (*The Wilsonian Moment*) show how World War I brought the United States and its people into world affairs. American rhetoric on the strength of its democracy and, later, Wilson’s articulation of self-determination influenced millions from African Americans demanding their rights as equal citizens to colonial territories pressing for their independence. World War I saw the United States preach ideals that would come to define their ideology on global affairs and inspire campaigns for such ideals that dominated the twentieth century.

BODY PARAGRAPH(S)

* **Topic Sentence** (Main point of the entire paragraph and what will be discussed) [1 Sentence]
* **Argument** (The presentation of the inference or theory that has been created; keep it logical and compatible) [1-2 Sentences]
* **Evidence** (After presenting the argument, present proof from outside sources and show how this information can eliminate opposing bias) [1-3 Sentences]
* **Concluding Statement** (Explain the significance of the main argument within the overall essay. In other words, how is this 1 of the key points that prove your thesis) [1 Sentence]

Ex.

Neiberg shows how the Great War mobilized the assimilation and acculturation of various ethnicities and races in the United States as America began to take a larger interest in world affairs. Watching the “Old World” colonial powers destroy each other confirmed Americans’ belief in the superiority of U.S. democratic values. This sense of superiority evolved into a duty for the United States to play the role of mediator in negotiating a peace, and later into winning the war to create a lasting peace. The recent immigrant populations of the nation identified with this sentiment and followed the larger national opinion, not due to pressure from nativist groups, but from genuine concern. Although, ethnic groups held differing reasons for supporting the Allies, from their home countries fighting on the side of the ally (Italians) to siding with the majority to not lose gains made in society (Jewish and African Americans). Neiberg argues that nearly all Americans felt that, despite whatever their personal views, it was their duty to defend the nation when under threat. This American identity based on the strength of democratic values became a part of the American mantra in World War II and the Cold War.

**CONCLUSION**

* **Rephrase Thesis Statement** (Place your argument in the beginning of the conclusion and revert the reader’s focus onto its importance) [1 Sentence]
* **Restate main body paragraph** **points** in conclusion (Express their overall significance in terms of the value that they add to the thesis) [1-3] Sentences
* **Overall Concluding Statement** (Express the value of your thesis in terms of real-world application or its significance within your own existence) [1-2 Sentences]

Ex.

Together these books show how the war influenced Americans and how Americans influenced the world. American ideals influenced subjugated peoples around the world to push for their independence and a place in international relations, while at home Americans formulated a greater understanding of their national values. Without taking into account these ideological and cultural developments one cannot grasp the later events of world history.

**PROPER CITATION**

For this class we will be using MLA Style of citation. For all those unfamiliar MLA style involves placing the author’s name and page number following the use of a quote from the book or material taken directly from the book. Quotes should not take up the majority of your paper or assignment. Quotes should be sprinkled sparingly throughout. Use direct quotes from outside sources to enhance and elaborate upon your argument. A quote can support a claim, but they cannot be a claim in and of themselves.

There are three ways to add quotes:

1. **With the person’s name in the sentence.**

Example:

*Dan Gutman shares a glimpse into the overall plot by stating, “I didn’t know it at the time, but a baseball card—for me—could function like a time machine” (5).*

* In the above example, Dan Gutman is the author of the book that this quote is pulled from.

1. **Without the person’s name in the sentence**

Example:

*The main character’s confusing experience is realized and explained when he states “I didn’t know it at the time, but a baseball card—for me—could function like a time machine” (Gutman 5).*

* In the above example, Dan Gutman’s name isn’t included in the sentence. The information in the parentheses at the end of the sentence is a proper MLA style citation of this type.

Paraphrases are created when text or speech from another source is added into a project, but the writer chooses to summarize them and weave in his or her own writing and writing style.

Even though the writer modifies the information from another source, it is still necessary to credit the source using proper MLA format. Paraphrased information uses the same MLA reference format as stated in the section directly above this one.

Here is an acceptable paraphrase:

**Original text:**

*“Stay hungry. Stay foolish.” Steve Jobs*

**Paraphrase:**

*Steve Jobs encouraged students at Stanford to continue with their determination, drive, and ambitious behavior. They should never be simply satisfied with the status quo. They should continue to push themselves despite possible obstacles and failures.*

* In this paraphrase you name the author to assign him credit. If this was taken from a book, add the page number at the end of the sentence in the format described above.