

# Outline of a Five-Paragraph Essay

**THE INTRODUCTION:** The first paragraph introduces the main points of the essay. The introduction contains a thesis statement—a sentence telling the reader what points will be discussed and how they will be addressed. The introduction’s topic sentence may also be the thesis statement, with the entire paragraph being an outline of the essay.

*The Writing Center is available to help students with **topic selection, organization, and mechanics**. Students often come to the Writing Center when they need help picking a topic. For those who know what they want to write about, the structure of the paper is their next main concern. Sometimes, students bring a paper that is already written and organized but which needs to be proofread for punctuation, grammar, and clarity. At any stage in the **writing process**, students can receive help from the Writing Center.*

1

**THE FIRST MAIN POINT:** The next paragraph addresses the first point mentioned in the thesis statement—**topic selection**. A topic sentence begins the paragraph, identifying the main point. The paragraph develops the point with proof and support. The concluding sentence summarizes the paragraph, preparing for the next point.

*Before research, many students come to the Writing Center seeking guidance in the selection, scope, and approach of their paper’s **topic**. Starting with a main idea is always preferable. If the paper’s subject is complex, “the more your initial focus will change as your drafts evolve.”<sup>1</sup> It is also important to decide how extensive the paper will be; otherwise, all points will not be equally addressed. The type of assignment is a significant factor in choosing the topic: submitting a reflection paper in lieu of a research paper will not be well received! Although the paper’s depth and approach may evolve, the **topic** always stays the same.*

2

**THE SECOND MAIN POINT:** The next paragraph covers the second point given in the thesis statement—**organization**.

*If **organization** is a weakness, students come to the Writing Center for help identifying major and minor points, consolidating similar ideas together, and transitioning between paragraphs and sections. The way a paper is arranged significantly affects its presentation. If critical information is blended with insignificant details, the reader may doubt its importance. Likewise, it is important that related thoughts are grouped together; a reader will quickly become confused if the writer’s thoughts seem to jump all over the place. Abruptly ending and beginning different points should also be avoided. The best paragraph concludes not only with a summarization of its content but also with a transition to the next section. This enables the reader to recognize a shift while maintaining a mental outline. When a student has difficulty with **structuring** a paper, someone more objective can often give a fresh perspective and a new idea.*

3

**THE THIRD MAIN POINT:** The next paragraph refers to the third point listed in the thesis statement—**mechanics**.

*Most students come to the Writing Center for help with **mechanical** issues, such as punctuation, grammar, and sentence clarity. Although punctuation is not the most important part of a paper, readers often depend on it to understand the meaning. Misplaced commas can cause “sentence parts . . . [to] collide into one another.”<sup>2</sup> Grammar helps to clarify the intended meaning, but if the subject and verb do not agree, the meaning is easily lost. Using the correct words is vital to the meaning; one person’s slang is another person’s typo! **Grammar and punctuation** are not the most vital issue, but they may be the most visible.*

4

**THE CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH:** The conclusion summarizes the points introduced in the thesis statement and discussed in the essay. The introduction and conclusion often use similar wording to complement each another.

*The Writing Center helps students with all stages of the **writing process**, including **topic selection, organization, and a review of proper grammar and punctuation**. A great deal of time and effort can be saved if the paper has a definite focus from the very beginning. A reader is more likely to respect the writer’s opinion when the paper’s structure is strong. Proofreading for mechanics is necessary because distracting errors detract from the content. During **every stage of writing** a paper, help is available.*

5

<sup>1</sup> Diana Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2003), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.