



Beyond High School Writing: Rethinking the 5-Paragraph Essay

- What is the 5-paragraph essay?
 - Introduction paragraph
 - 3 body paragraphs
 - Topic sentence
 - Alternating between 'Concrete Evidence' and 'Commentary' sentences
 - Concluding sentence
 - Concluding paragraph
- Why is it the standard format in high school English classes?
 - It's a good structure to follow when first learning how to write an essay, which can be overwhelming
- What are good points to take away from it?
 - It is good to always provide analysis/commentary on each quote or piece of evidence provided (although it doesn't need to always be immediately following)
 - Helps reader focus & remember—when used for right kind of assignment
 - 3 main units: introduction, body, and conclusion
- What are the problems with the 5-paragraph formula?
 - Doesn't always show the writer's train of thought, but rather molds it into a certain formula
 - This formula calls for the writers to rank their ideas in order of most-least significant; this does not necessarily mean that the paragraphs will be in a logical order, since they're ranked on quality rather than building off of each other's ideas
 - Cookie-cutter approach; "bland and planned" (<http://www.english.illinois.edu/people/faculty/schaffner/Nunnally.pdf>)
 - Can be too narrow; doesn't necessarily allow for the writer to go more in depth into a certain topic, because there may not be room within this structure for further elaboration
 - Can lead students to spend more time proving that something is a certain way than explaining possible reasons why
 - Can lead to "a restatement of plot" or summary more easily (http://www.csun.edu/~bashforth/406_PDF/406_Genre/00Sep_EJ_IIIEffects5ParaEssay.pdf)
- How do you go beyond the standard 5-paragraph format?
 - Discover the questions the assignment is asking you to tackle: *What am I writing about? Why am I writing about this topic? What do I know about this topic and what do I still have to find out? What are my personal feelings on the matter? What effect do I want my writing to have on the reader? What is my reader's understanding of*

the issue? What biases or objections should I take into account? These questions are the most challenging ones for any writer and, unfortunately, the ones least often asked of high school students”

(http://www.csun.edu/~bashforth/406_PDF/406_Genre/00Sep_EJ_IIIEffects5ParaEssay.pdf)

- Match the demands of the assignment to the type and structure of writing you will do: close reading, research papers, compare/contrast assignments, assignments that require analysis of causes/effects, assignments that require you to apply theory
- How do you form a thesis without simply finding 3 supporting arguments to a point?
 - How + what + why
 - specific topic + debatable view + significance to the audience
(<http://www.chicagonow.com/white-rhino/2012/05/if-you-teach-or-write-5-paragraph-essays-stop-it/>)
 - See example between “5-paragraph thesis” and “college thesis”:
(<http://www.csulb.edu/~eguzik/fivepara.html>)
- How do I write an introduction if it’s not just one sentence about each of the body paragraphs?
 - Allow the introduction to become “kind of like a movie preview,” where you provide enough information to give the reader an idea of where your argument is going and how it’s going to play out
(<http://www.csulb.edu/~eguzik/fivepara.html>)
- How do you know how many paragraphs to write?
 - Brainstorm ways to support your thesis, or main points that you want to argue or present within the paper
 - Group these together as makes sense, cut out ideas that don’t seem as strong, and make sure that the final list of topics could form a logical argument to support your main claim (thesis)
 - Assume that each paragraph will take up roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of a page, and make sure that the number of paragraphs you have will result in the assigned page length of your paper, if there is one
 - Several potential purposes for a paragraph, see which of these fit and how many are necessary:
 - to define terms, to review the literature,
 - to present evidence in favor of the thesis, to
 - to analyze that evidence
 - to accommodate and/or refute opposing views
(http://www.csun.edu/~bashforth/406_PDF/406_Genre/00Sep_EJ_IIIEffects5ParaEssay.pdf)
- Let your thesis determine your organization – break the thesis into parts and plan how many paragraphs each “part” will require.
- How do I conclude?
 - reassert the writer’s position
 - remind the reader of the importance to him/her of the problem at hand
 - pose questions on the issue that could be addressed by other writers
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