42 Essays

An essay is a group of paragraphs about one topic. It has three main parts: an introduction (or introductory paragraph), a body, and a conclusion (or concluding paragraph).

1. The introduction introduces the topic of the essay and arouses the reader's interest. It always contains one sentence that clearly states the main idea of the whole essay. This sentence is called the thesis statement.
2. The body of an essay is made up of one or more paragraphs. Each body paragraph explains or develops one part of the essay topic. The body paragraphs are arranged according to a pattern of organization such as time order or comparison and contrast.
3. The conclusion is the last paragraph. It summarizes the main points of the essay.

Reference: To write an essay, follow the steps of creating, organizing, writing, and polishing described in *Section 40.*

! *Special Tip*

Because an essay is longer than a paragraph, it is especially helpful to make and follow an outline in order to keep good organization. To see an example of an essay outline, go to *Section 40b,* pages 262–263.

42a Introduction

An introduction, or introductory paragraph, is the first paragraph of an essay. It has two purposes: It introduces your topic, and it catches your reader's attention. There are several kinds of introductions.

"Funnel" introduction

In academic and business writing, a typical introductory paragraph is a "funnel" introduction. A funnel introduction begins with one or two very general sentences about the topic. Each subsequent sentence becomes increasingly focused on the subject until the last sentence, which states very specifically what you are going to write about. Writing a funnel introduction is like focusing a camera with a telephoto lens. You start with a wide picture and gradually narrow the focus so that just one object appears in your viewfinder: your thesis statement. The thesis statement is usually the last sentence in an introductory paragraph. (In each of the following examples of introductions, the thesis statement is in boldface type.)

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Any person who has lived in the twentieth century has seen a lot of changes take place, and the twenty-first century will bring even greater changes. Some people are excited by the challenges that these changes offer; others worry about their consequences. ***The twenty-first century will bring certain advantages such as faster communication and a higher standard of living, but it will also bring some disadvantages such as increased pollution and the depersonalization of human relationships.***

Present surprising statistics, facts, or examples

The following kinds of introductions show different ways to catch your reader's attention.

Describe a dramatic event.

First, the windows began to rattle. Then the floor beneath our feet began to move. A moment later, the light fixture above the dining table began to swing back and forth, and we heard glass breaking, walls cracking, and books and other objects falling to the floor. We had just experienced a 6.1 earthquake. It had lasted less than a minute, but the damage was terrible. ***This earthquake made it clear to our family that we needed to prepare better for the next one.***

Present surprising statistics, facts, or examples.

On average, a male college graduate earns $800,000 more during his lifetime than a male high school graduate, and a female college graduate earns about $600,000 more than a female high school graduate. What's more, high school graduates are twice as likely as college graduates to become unemployed. It is clear that a college education brings significant financial rewards, but there are other benefits as well. ***A college education is a good investment for four reasons.***

Give historical background.

The Pilgrims who arrived in Massachusetts in 1620 came to find religious freedom. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, large numbers of African men and women were brought as slaves to work on plantations in the South. Immigrants from northern and southern Europe came in the early nineteenth century to escape poor economic conditions. Later in the same century, the first immigrants from China came as contract laborers to build the railroads connecting East and West. In the century just past, political and economic refugees arrived from Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Indeed, immigrants have come to the United States from many different parts of the world, and they have come for many different reasons. ***Their ability to adjust to life in their adopted land has depended on several factors.***

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Tell an entertaining story.

I was five years old and still believed in Santa Claus. One Christmas Eve, I carefully poured a glass of milk and arranged two peanut butter cookies on a small plate. I placed them on a table near the fireplace, where Santa would see them when he came to deliver our presents. Imagine my concern the next morning when I discovered both cookies, soggy and uneaten, floating in the bathroom toilet. ***I slowly began to suspect that the world was not exactly as I had pictured it.***

! *Special Tip*

Writing a good introduction is not always easy. If you find writing an introduction difficult, try writing it later, after you have written the body paragraphs. Some writers even write the introduction last.

Thesis statement

The most important part of an introduction is the thesis statement. A thesis statement is a sentence that specifically states what the essay is going to be about. It usually appears at the end of the introductory paragraph and gives the reader an idea of what he or she is going to read. Just as a diner at a restaurant can predict the approximate contents of a salad from the words "potato salad" or "mixed green salad," a reader should be able to predict the approximate contents of your essay from reading your thesis statement.

States topic and subtopics

The thesis statement always states the main topic and often lists the subtopics as well.

Main topic

▶ Young people in my culture have less freedom than young people in the United States in making three of life's major decisions.

Main topic + subtopics

▶ Young people in my culture have less freedom than young people in the United States in their choice of where they live, whom they marry, and what their job is.

Shows the pattern of organization

The pattern of organization often shows in the thesis statement. These are examples of thesis statements for various patterns.

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Time order	▸ Beginning in World War II and continuing through the period of rapid economic growth, the status of women in my country has changed.
Logical division of ideas	▸ The status of women in my country has changed in recent years in the areas of economic independence, political rights, educational opportunities, and social status.
Comparison and contrast	▸ Although the status of women in my country has improved in recent years, it is still very low when compared to the status of women in industrialized countries.
Cause and effect	▸ The status of women in my country has changed in recent years due to increased educational opportunities and changes in the laws.

Reference: Learn more about patterns of essay organization in *Section 42d.*

! *Special Tips*

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in your essay, so write it with special thought and care. Avoid these common problems.

1. The thesis is too general.

Too general	✗ A college education is a good investment.
Improved	▸ A college education is a good investment for four reasons.
Too general	✗ Lasers are very useful.
Improved	▸ Lasers have several applications in industry and medicine.

2. The thesis makes an announcement.

Announcement	✗ I am going to teach you how to make a flower lei.
Improved	▸ Making a flower lei is not difficult if you follow these instructions.

3. The thesis states an obvious fact.

Obvious fact	✗ The Internet is a communication superhighway.
Improved	▸ The explosion of the Internet has had both positive and negative consequences.
Obvious fact	✗ I had to adjust to a new culture when I moved here.
Improved	▸ Adjusting to a new culture was a challenging experience in more than one way.

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PRACTICE—Section 42a

The sentences in the following introductory paragraph are in scrambled order. Put the sentences in the correct order. Place the thesis statement last.

> Although there was a smoke detector in his home, the man's hearing was so poor that he couldn't hear its warning signal. In the same week, a ninety-year-old man burned to death in his home. He had left a pot on the stove, which had started a fire. Experts who have studied the problem have proposed three possible programs. With an increasing population of elderly people, this country needs to find better ways to take care of them. Last month, an ambulance rushed an eighty-nine-year-old woman to the emergency room. A neighbor had found her on her living room floor, where she had been lying for two days after falling.

42b Body

The body of an essay is made up of one or more paragraphs. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and sometimes a concluding sentence. Each body paragraph explains in detail one subtopic mentioned in the thesis statement, so the number of body paragraphs will vary according to the number of subtopics.

Depending on your topic and your purpose, the pattern of organization of body paragraphs can be time order, comparison and contrast, logical division of ideas, and so on (see *Section 42d*).

Transitions between paragraphs

It is helpful to use transitions between paragraphs to show how one paragraph is related to another. Transitions can tell your reader if the topic of the next paragraph follows the same line of thought or reverses direction.

Follows the same line of thought	▸ **Besides industrial uses,** lasers also have many medical applications.
Reverses direction	▸ **On the other hand,** lasers can be used as weapons of war.

Notice how transitions link body paragraphs.

Introduction	Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Body	***The first reason*** a college education is a good investment is financial. Statistics show that men and women with college degrees earn a lot more money than those with only high school diplomas. Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

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In addition to earning more money, college graduates have a wider choice of jobs, and their jobs are likely to be more interesting. Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

A college education leads ***not only*** to more interesting and better-paying jobs, ***but*** it may ***also*** lead you to discover new interests and uncover unknown talents. Xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

The final reason a college education is a good investment is the personal contacts you make while in college. Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Conclusion

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

42c Conclusion

The conclusion is the last paragraph of an essay. It has three purposes:

1. It signals the end of the essay.
2. It reminds the reader of your main points.
3. It leaves the reader with your final thoughts on the topic. Notice how the writer accomplishes these three purposes in the following conclusion.

To sum up, a college education provides at least four main benefits. College graduates enjoy greater financial rewards, and they also have more choices in choosing a career. In addition, taking college classes in different fields may reveal hidden interests and talents that enrich one's personal life as well as providing opportunities for social contacts. Indeed, a college education is well worth investing time and money in now in order to have a better future.

- The transition phrase *To sum up* signals the end of the essay.
- It summarizes the main points: the four benefits of a college education.
- It gives a final comment: investing now will bring a better future.

Begin your conclusion with a conclusion transition signal. (See *Section 41e*, page 283, for a list of transition signals.)

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! Special Tips

1. Don't use the exact same words in your conclusion that you used in your thesis statement or topic sentences. Find different ways to express the same points.
2. Don't introduce a new idea in the conclusion. Compare these two conclusions:

New idea

To sum up, laser technology is bringing great benefits to humankind. There are hundreds of uses for lasers in industry, and more are discovered every day. Also, medical science is developing new ways to use lasers. On the negative side, lasers have the potential to become terrible weapons of destruction. ***We owe it to our children and grandchildren to make sure that lasers are used for peaceful purposes only. Therefore, the government should cancel the "Star Wars" system of space weapons.***

Revised

To sum up, laser technology is bringing great benefits to humankind. There are hundreds of uses for lasers in industry, and more are discovered every day. Also, medical science is developing new ways to use lasers. On the negative side, lasers have the potential to become terrible weapons of destruction. ***The future direction of this new technology is in our hands.***

You could use the first conclusion for a different kind of essay—one in which you argue against the use of lasers as weapons. However, it is not a good conclusion for an essay in which you only explain the different uses of lasers.

PRACTICE—Section 42c

Read the following introduction. Then choose the best conclusion from the choices listed.

Introduction

When two countries come into contact over a period of time, there is usually a cultural exchange. Countries import and export words, products, food, and even values. Sometimes cultural imports benefit the importing country. Sometimes they are neither good nor bad. Sometimes, however, imports harm the importing culture. My own country has been influenced by other countries in all three ways.

Possible conclusions

1. In conclusion, other countries have influenced my country in many areas. Our citizens buy Japanese electronics, which have clearly benefited our society. Our young people wear blue jeans and drink Coca-Cola, which are relatively harmless imports from the United States. However, many of our young people have also adopted the values that they see in Hollywood movies. It is unfortunate that countries can't just import the good and keep the bad out.

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2. In conclusion, my country has been influenced by other countries in many ways. We have benefited from some and been harmed by others. Other imports have been neither especially helpful nor harmful. Some people in my country would like to stop harmful cultural imports. For example, they want to ban Hollywood movies and even the use of English. In my opinion, you can't—and shouldn't—stop the flow of ideas between countries. It is unfortunate that countries can't just import the good and keep the bad out.
3. In conclusion, my country has Japanese electronics, American blue jeans, and French perfume. As a result, we are culturally richer. It is unfortunate that countries can't just import the good and keep the bad out.

42d Patterns of essay organization

Like paragraphs, essays in English often have typical patterns of organization. The pattern you choose depends on your topic and your purpose. For example, to explain how to celebrate a special holiday, you might use a time-order pattern of organization. To discuss a problem such as homelessness or teenage gangs, you might use a cause-and-effect pattern.

Following are examples of five patterns of essay organization: (1) time order, (2) logical division of ideas, (3) comparison and contrast, (4) cause and effect, and (5) argumentation.

Time order

Use time order for process essays (essays that explain how to do or make something) and for narrative essays (essays that tell a story or relate an event). (See pages 286–287 in *Section 41f* for more information about time order.)

Topics for time-order essays are similar to the following.

Process topics

- How to cook a special dish
- How to give a surprise birthday party
- How to dance the *lambada*
- How we celebrate New Year's in my country
- How to take a perfect vacation in my country
- How to paint a house/car/room
- How to prepare for an earthquake

Narrative topics

- A learning experience
- Leaving home
- A frightening event
- An unforgettable day in my life
- A typical day in my future life
- The day I learned the meaning of _____ . (*fear, love, courage, compassion, frustration, relief, regret, anger, kindness, generosity, mean-spiritedness, incompetence,* etc.)

Transition signals for time order include the following words and phrases.

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