

The Basic Outline of a Paper

The following outline shows a basic format for most academic papers. No matter what length the paper needs to be, it should still follow the format of having an introduction, body, and conclusion. Read over what typically goes in each section of the paper. Use the back of this handout to outline information for your specific paper.

I. Introduction

The introduction should have **some** of the following elements, depending on the type of paper:

- Start with an attention grabber: a short story, example, statistic, or historical context that introduces the paper topic
- Give an overview of any issues involved with the subject
- Define of any key terminology need to understand the topic
- Quote or paraphrase sources revealing the controversial nature of the subject (argumentative papers only)
- Highlight background information on the topic needed to understand the direction of the paper
- Write an antithesis paragraph, presenting the primary opposing views (argumentative paper only)

The introduction must end with a THESIS statement (a 1 to 2 sentences in length):

- Tell what the overall paper will focus on
- Briefly outline the main points in the paper

II. Body

- Clearly present the main points of the paper as listed in the thesis
- Give strong examples, details, and explanations to support each main points
- If an argumentative paper, address any counterarguments and refute those arguments
- If a research paper, use strong evidence from sources—paraphrases, summaries, and quotations that support the main points

III. Conclusion

- Restate your thesis from the introduction in different words
- Briefly summarize each main point found in the body of the paper (avoid going over 2 sentences for each point)
- Give a statement of the consequences of not embracing the position (argumentative paper only)
- End with a strong clincher statement: an appropriate, meaningful final sentence that ties the whole point of the paper together (may refer back to the attention grabber)

Additional Tips

- Decide on the thesis and main points first
- You do not need to start writing your paper with the introduction
- Try writing the thesis and body first; then go back and figure out how to best introduce the body and conclude the paper
- Use transitions between main points and between examples within the main points
- Always keep your thesis in the forefront of your mind while writing; everything in your paper must point back to the thesis
- Use the back of this handout to make an outline of your paper