



Illinois Valley Community College  
Writing Center

**BODY PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE**

Body paragraphs work to develop your essay’s thesis statement. They contain the support needed to fully develop your ideas and convince your reader that your thesis statement is reasonable. **In college, your paragraphs should be well-developed, perhaps a half-page in length or more.** Here are some guidelines for writing effective body paragraphs:

**1. Each paragraph should be unified:**

A paragraph is unified when each sentence it contains supports the main idea of the paragraph. To achieve unity, use topic sentences. This sentence is the first of the paragraph and states its main idea. Every sentence in a particular paragraph should work to support the topic sentence of that paragraph. In turn, each topic sentence should support the thesis statement of the essay. In this way, your paper builds support for the main idea of your essay and your paragraphs are unified.

**2. Each paragraph should be coherent:**

All the sentences in a paragraph need to flow smoothly and logically. Using key words is one way to help connect your sentences. Key words can echo important terms to carry concepts from one sentence to another. Pronouns are also useful; use these to refer to important nouns in previous sentences. Finally, use transitions to show chronological sequence, cause and effect, etc.

**3. Each paragraph should be well developed:**

Your paragraphs should contain support to bolster your main idea. Some common types of support are examples, quotations, statistics, details, facts, and personal experience. Be sure to explain how your support helps to strengthen your topic sentence. A well-developed paragraph is roughly two-thirds of a page in length. Paragraphs that are shorter than this may be underdeveloped, while longer paragraphs may not have good focus.

Example body paragraph

*Thesis statement of essay: The benefits of attending a community college include quality instructors, financial savings, and career-oriented classes.*

Instructors at community colleges tend to be very dedicated to their work. At most four-year universities, the professors and instructors are focused on more than just teaching. They work in a “publish or perish atmosphere that puts emphasis on research” (Smith 12). While this is very important work, it can result in professors who are more concerned with their next publishing deadline than effectively teaching a class. However, at a community college, the instructors operate in a completely different atmosphere. Most of these instructors are dedicated to teaching and identify helping students as the most important aspect of their jobs. They are under no pressure to publish, which leaves them free to focus on their teaching career.

Topic sentence states main idea

Quotation offers support

Key word is repeated

Transition helps readers follow ideas

Pronoun refers to previous noun

## WRITING CLAIM-EVIDENCE-ANALYSIS PARAGRAPHS

An effective approach to composing paragraphs is to use the claim-evidence-analysis formula. In this strategy, each paragraph begins with an assertion that is supported or amplified by evidence, which is in turn interpreted through analysis.

- *Claim:* The claim should appear in your topic sentence. It states the main argument of your paragraph and prepares the reader for what the paragraph will prove or explain. Often, the claim goes beyond a statement of mere fact to preview the interpretation of the evidence you will present later in the paragraph.
- *Evidence:* The evidence, which should be relevant and credible, works to support your claim. Quotations, paraphrases, descriptions, examples, and statistics are common types of evidence.
- *Analysis:* The analysis is where you present your interpretation of the evidence. It should explain how the evidence supports the claim and show your perspective on the topic, which may not be evident to the reader. Think of analysis as answering the questions, “So what? Why is that evidence interesting and important? How does it support my claim?”

Keep in mind that you should have no “floating” evidence; your comments should surround and explain your support. Be sure to introduce quotations in your own words.

### Sample paragraph using C-E-A

Gansberg’s precise language and lack of judgment allow the readers to draw their own conclusions. He writes, “A housewife, knowingly if quite casually, said, ‘We thought it was a lover’s quarrel’” (Gansberg 122). However, it is clear that something more than a quarrel was going on. Witnesses admit that they heard the commotion but chose to ignore it. Gansberg says that Miss Genovese screamed that she was being stabbed and later, that she was dying (121). Gansberg’s writing, which does not judge the witnesses, invites the readers to do the judging themselves. Clearly, the people who heard the murder happening could have stepped in. By not placing blame through his writing, Gansberg encourages readers to make the connection themselves.

Claim

Evidence

Evidence

Analysis

Conclusion sentence

Notice how the paragraph begins with a claim, the evidence/analysis pattern repeats twice, and the paragraph ends with a conclusion sentence.