

Body Paragraphs

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to write effective body paragraphs for your academic research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Primary Thesis Support

If your thesis gives the reader a road map to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement.

The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points you choose to expand on your thesis, and it is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further bolstered by supporting details within the paragraphs.

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards.

1. *Be specific.* The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.
2. *Be relevant to the thesis.* Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.
3. *Be detailed.* Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows

readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

2. Types of Evidence

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance.

The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research.

1. Facts: Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.

2. Judgments: Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.

3. Testimony: Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; she adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on facts, judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.

4. Personal observation: Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists of your own testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you had experiences which you have since formed either opinions or judgments about.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child’s social development, you could use your own experience as one way to support your thesis.

3. Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should therefore contain a topic sentence followed by supporting details (e.g., examples, reasons, or arguments).

Topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay. These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement, thus reminding readers what your essay is about.

A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

Consider the following thesis statement:

Author J. D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

The following topic sentence is a primary support point for the thesis. This topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is. Later, you will see the writer immediately provide support for the sentence.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works.

4. Supporting Sentences

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

Thesis statement: Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.

Supporting point 1: Dogs can scare cyclists and pedestrians.

Supporting details:

1. Cyclists are forced to zigzag on the road.
2. School children panic and turn wildly on their bikes.
3. People who are walking at night freeze in fear.

Supporting point 2: Loose dogs are traffic hazards.

Supporting details:

1. Dogs in the street make people swerve their cars.
2. To avoid dogs, drivers run into other cars or pedestrians.
3. Children coaxing dogs across busy streets create danger.

Supporting point 3: Unleashed dogs damage gardens.

Supporting details:

1. They step on flowers and vegetables.
2. They destroy hedges by urinating on them.
3. They mess up lawns by digging holes.

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the topic sentence, which is underlined:

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, "You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live." His short story "A Perfect Day for a Bananafish" details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released from an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short story, "For Esme—with Love and Squalor," is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger's only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, he continues with the theme of post-traumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that body paragraphs are made up of **primary thesis support**, which consists of the major points you will use to expand on your thesis throughout the essay. This support is further backed up by different **types of evidence**, which can include facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observations. You also learned that **topic sentences** connect the body paragraphs back to the thesis, while **supporting sentences** provide details and evidence that support the topic sentences.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Writing Body Paragraphs" and "Developing Unified and Coherent Paragraphs" tutorials.