

Essay Writing and the "Big Picture"

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial examines essay writing by considering the concept of the "big picture," claims and support, and outlines. The role of paragraphs, and the importance of the revising and editing steps, are also investigated.

This tutorial discusses "Essay Writing and the 'Big Picture'" in four parts:

1. Claims and Support
2. Outlines
3. Paragraphs
4. Revising and Editing

1. Claims and Support

Essays are written to propose and support a thesis. They do so by making claims and supporting them with evidence, and by using techniques that include logic and rhetoric. The need to support a thesis impacts every step in the writing process.



BIG IDEA

The goal of the writing process is the production of written work that is coherent and presents a logical flow of ideas. Keeping this "big picture" in mind throughout the process will enable you to write better essays.

2. Outlines

Outlining is one of the most important steps in the writing process. At a minimum, a good outline includes the following elements:

- A working thesis (which is subject to change as the essay is developed)
- An organizational plan for body paragraphs, including the primary claims
- Information about supporting details for each main idea or claim

When it includes these elements, an outline functions as "scaffolding" for a writing project. It provides a "big picture" overview of how the essay will develop.

3. Paragraphs

Each paragraph in an essay should present one main idea or claim. It should contain a topic sentence, which serves the same purpose as the thesis of the essay — at the paragraph level. It should also include expansion of the main idea, and evidence or other information that supports the topic sentence. The topic sentence, and the supporting sentences that form the rest of the paragraph, must support the essay's thesis. If they do not, they should be removed from the essay.

Each paragraph in an essay should clearly indicate how and why it supports the thesis. When in doubt, writers should make those connections explicit.



When writing, it can be easy to get lost in the detailed work involved in constructing effective paragraphs. As you write, refer to your outline and working thesis so that you won't lose sight of the "big picture."

4. Revising and Editing

Revising and editing are two of the most critical activities in the writing process. During the revising and editing stages, writers revisit their writing projects at the "big picture" level. They review drafts and determine, paragraph by paragraph, whether everything in the essay supports the thesis. They evaluate whether there are other ideas or claims that may also support the thesis, and consider how to address them in the next draft.

At this point in the process, writers should make sure that ideas, claims, and evidence are well-organized and presented in a sequence that maximizes their support of the thesis.



This tutorial examined essay writing in terms of the "big picture." It included discussion of claims and support, and how outlines enable writers to plan writing projects and keep them on track. The ways in which well-constructed paragraphs keep the focus on the thesis, and the revising and editing steps (when writers ensure that a draft essay supports its thesis) were also considered.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall