

# Thesis Math and Outlining

Once you have chosen a topic for your paper, it's a good idea to establish an outline, or road map, for readers to follow. Creating an outline for your paper is like drawing up a blueprint for a building; it should be easy to understand and clearly communicate the purpose of your paper. After outlining, it becomes easy to add, remove, or change details in your paper as you research your topic and shape your ideas.

## Introductions

An introduction is your only chance to make a good first impression on your reader, so it's very important to spend time drafting an effective one. It should identify what your paper will be about and grab the reader's attention. It may also include your thesis statement, which can be made up of more than one sentence (see below).

### Your introduction should

- Hook the reader's attention on your subject and arouse curiosity;
- Give background information by focusing your topic and purpose (informative or persuasive), quickly summarizing the history or context of the problem;
- Provide your thesis statement, including your topic, claim, and main points of the essay—evidence or reasons that support the claim (*The Little, Brown Handbook* 28).

Be aware that you do not have to draft the introduction first; that can actually make it more difficult. Many writers draft the introduction last to ensure that it reflects the content of the paper.

## Thesis Math

It is often helpful to consider your thesis as the answer to a research question; it should state the main points of your paper's discussion and how you will inform the reader about the topic. In other words, your thesis helps familiarize the reader with your paper's outline and main ideas. Your thesis can be compared to a math equation that basically includes the following (in any order):

**[topic + claim + evidence]**

OR:

[what your paper will discuss + your message/position + main points or reasons that support the claim]

## Commonly Used Thesis Math Equations

For:	Include in your thesis:	Mention:
Persuasive Essay/Proposal	Topic, claim, evidence	Possible solutions to the problem
Literary Analysis	Title, author, theme, literary elements (character, tone, setting, point of view, climax, etc.)	Devices or tools used by the author to support the theme (message)
Rhetorical Analysis	Topic, author's claim, evidence	Rhetorical strategies (ethos, logos, pathos) as types of evidence
Compare/Contrast Essay or Argumentative Analysis (two or more perspectives on the same issue)	Topic, individuals/groups involved, their varying claims, evidence/reasons	Possible solutions to the problem (proposed by you or involved parties)

## Basic (Skeleton) Outlines

Most writers are familiar with the five-paragraph essay model, which includes an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Using this same basic format, you can create an outline for virtually any writing assignment. It's for you to decide (based on the assignment's specific requirements listed in your prompt) how many paragraphs your essay will have and how long your paper will be, but it should include these three essential parts:

- I. Introduction (including hook, background information, and thesis)
- II. Body (main points and supporting examples discussed in detailed paragraphs)
- III. Conclusion (restates thesis in an original way to include what you/the reader learned from your essay; uses a conclusion strategy\*)

## Fleshing Out Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph should focus on a main point that supports your claim (previously mentioned in your thesis statement). Remember that your evidence (main points) should be discussed in the same order listed in the thesis; otherwise, you risk confusing the reader. For example,

**Thesis:** "Pennies should remain a part of America's currency because they <sup>1</sup>increase government profits, <sup>2</sup>save consumers money, and <sup>3</sup>are vital to American history and culture."

Body paragraphs following this thesis must accomplish these tasks in *the order given above*:

One way to build thorough yet concise body paragraphs is to use the following process as a step-by-step way to evaluate (and support) your main points:

1. Introduce your paragraph's main discussion point by giving an **example** from your text or research (quote, summary, paraphrase, statistic, story); cite it properly using MLA format.
2. **Analyze** this example by stating why it is important or relevant to the reader and/or the claim.
3. **Interpret** this example further by telling the audience what it means and how it supports your thesis statement.

By adhering to this evaluative pattern, you are logically connecting your thesis, topic sentences, and details in a way that supports your claim and conclusion. Use appropriate **transitions** to link paragraphs, steps, and ideas together (*The Little, Brown Handbook* 86-87). This framework helps develop a paper that coherently synthesizes about 33 percent of facts and recorded data (or expert opinion) with your own analysis and ideas (the remaining 66 percent of your paper's composition). *This is an ideal ratio for most assignments—refer to your prompt for further instructions.*

## Conclusions

A conclusion is your last chance to tie your paragraphs together and assure that readers have understood your purpose and ideas. An effective conclusion will often echo the introduction but will use a different strategy.\*

**\*For more help with practical strategies for writing introductions and conclusions, consult our *Introductions and Conclusions* handout (Writing Center) or pp. 103-09 of *The Little, Brown Handbook*.**