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By Dr. Karen Petit

Like the framework of a house, an essay's structure helps to arrange and to hold together the different parts. A clear structure can help readers to read more quickly and to enjoy the reading experience. As writers, we do not want our readers to have to reread sections of our essays over and over again to try and figure out the meaning. To make the essay-reading process easier for our readers, we should clearly structure our essays by including **an introduction, a thesis (placed early in the essay), at least two body paragraphs (each with a clear focus or topic sentence), supporting details in the body paragraphs, a conclusion, and transitions to connect the different parts together.**

Introduction
An introduction**,** like the front door of a house, should introduce the author's topic to the reader, hopefully in an interesting fashion. Here are some examples of ways to introduce a topic:
1. an anecdote (a story)
2. a quotation (Correct use of a documentation system—such as the MLA or the APA system--is needed.)
3. a summary or a paraphrase (Correct use of a documentation system is needed.)
4. an interesting or surprising piece of information
5. descriptive words that create a picture for the reader
6. a funnel opener (This kind of introduction moves from a general statement on the topic to a more narrowly focused thesis statement.)

Thesis
In most cases, a thesis should be placed early in an essay. Readers often expect to see a thesis at the end of the introduction. One method of creating a thesis is to write it in the form of a grammatical sentence: the subject (or focused topic) will be followed by the predicate (or what the author is saying about the focused topic). A thesis:
1. states the main idea of an essay
2. should contain the author's opinion on a topic
3. is not a statement of fact nor is it an announcement
4. should be focused enough so that it can be supported in the body paragraphs of the essay
5. often (but not always) previews the essay's body paragraphs
6. might include one or more of the following words: "should," "reasons," and "because"
7. might include one or more adjectives that help to state an opinion on the topic

might indicate the essay's method of idea development (Some examples are narration, description, examples, comparison/contrast, process analysis, division/classification, definition, causes/effects, problem/solution, and argument.)

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Body paragraphs

Each body paragraph, like each room in a house, needs a structure, a clear focus, and supporting details or "decoration." A paragraph's structure often includes a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph. A topic sentence, like a thesis statement, can be written in the form of a grammatical sentence: the subject (or the paragraph's topic area) is followed by the predicate (or what the author is saying about the topic area). The topic sentence should be supported by both primary and secondary levels of ideas. These supporting ideas can take many different forms, but they might include one or more of the following: descriptive details, examples, explanations, supporting information, reasons, statistics, transitions, and quotations from experts.

Conclusion

A conclusion often includes a rewording of the thesis statement or summary of the essay's main ideas. A conclusion, like the back door of a house, offers a final "view" of the topic. Here are some additional methods for concluding an essay: a memorable statement, commentary about future projects or actions, the solution to a problem, and an action that the readers of the essay can take.

The following websites have additional information:

The Community College of Rhode Island's website has many online resources, including

handouts, PowerPoint presentations, and quizzes: http://www.ccri.edu/writingcenter/.

Cengage Learning's online grammar quizzes:

http://www.cengage.com/devenglish/discipline_content/grammarquizzes.html.

Exercises at Grammar Bytes: http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm.

The OWL's Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/.