

The following outline shows a basic format for most academic papers. No matter what length the paper needs to be, it should still follow the format of having an introduction, body, and conclusion. Read over what typically goes in each section of the paper and use the relevant elements as necessary. Headings and subheadings are strongly encouraged. The importance of accurate and informative titles cannot be understated. Those elements listed in italics are optional, dependent wholly on the type of paper being written.

## I. Introduction

The introduction should have **some** of the following elements, depending on the type of paper.

- ✓ Start with an attention grabber: a short story, example, statistic, or historical context that introduces the paper topic,
- ✓ Give an overview of any issues involved with the subject to provide some context for your paper topic,
- ✓ Define of any key terminology need to understand the topic (this is generally a good place to cite academic literature),
- ✓ *Quote or paraphrase sources revealing the controversial nature of the subject (argumentative papers only),*
- ✓ Highlight background information on the topic needed to understand the direction of the paper, put your paper in context within the subject,
- ✓ *Write an antithesis paragraph, presenting the primary opposing views (argumentative paper only),*
- ✓ The introduction must end with a THESIS statement (a 1 to 2 sentences in length), a statement that responds directly to the research question and will be supported throughout the remainder of your paper, and
- ✓ Provide a road map to your paper: tell what the overall paper will focus on, briefly outlining the main points and/or sections in the paper.

## II. Body

- ✓ Clearly restate the main point of the paper as listed in the introduction section,
- ✓ Give strong examples, details, and explanations to support each main point,
- ✓ If an argumentative paper, address any counterarguments and refute those arguments, and
- ✓ If a research paper, use strong evidence from sources (e.g. academic papers, books, official reports)—paraphrases, summaries, and quotations that support the main points.

## III. Conclusion

- ✓ Restate your thesis from the introduction in different words,
- ✓ Briefly summarize each main point found in the body of the paper (avoid going over two sentences for each point), and relate them back to the thesis,
- ✓ *Give a statement of the consequences of not embracing the position (argumentative paper only),* and
- ✓ End with a strong clincher statement: an appropriate, meaningful final sentence that ties the whole point of the paper together (may refer back to the attention grabber).

## Additional Tips

- ✓ Decide on the thesis and main points first, make it firm enough to guide your work, but flexible enough to change as your research becomes more informed,
- ✓ You do not need to start writing your paper with the introduction; try writing the thesis and body first; then go back and figure out how to best introduce the body and conclude the paper,
- ✓ Use transitions between main points and between examples within the main points,
- ✓ Always keep your thesis in the forefront of your mind while writing; everything in your paper must point back to the thesis, especially the first and last sentence of your body paragraphs, and
- ✓ Use the back of this handout to make an outline of your paper.



# The Basic Outline of a Paper

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Paper Topic/Research Question: \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Introduction

Attention grabber: \_\_\_\_\_

Overview: \_\_\_\_\_

Key terms to define (refer to research question): \_\_\_\_\_

Relevant background information: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis statement: \_\_\_\_\_

Road map: \_\_\_\_\_

## II. Body (A paper may have a few or many main points; decide how many your paper will need)

Main Point 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples/Details/Explanations & Supporting Source, if relevant:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

Main Point 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples/Details/Explanations & Supporting Source, if relevant:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

Main Point 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples/Details/Explanations & Supporting Source, if relevant:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

## III. Conclusion

Reworded Thesis (Usually found near the beginning of the conclusion): \_\_\_\_\_

Main Point 1 Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Point 2 Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Point 3 Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Ideas to Conclude: \_\_\_\_\_

Clincher Ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

