

## Anatomy of Body Paragraphs in Academic Essays

**Content of this handout:** This handout will concentrate on the anatomy of **body paragraphs** (#2 on the list below). Given that *most* of an essay consists of body paragraphs, these are the pieces of writing that will take most of the time to plan, formulate, and execute.

**The point of this handout:** Ideally, this handout will serve as a gauge for your writing progress. Use this handout as a **checklist** for your FWIS 105 essays before submission.

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Academic essays contain the following elements:

- Introduction
- Body Paragraphs
- Conclusion

Successfully crafted **body paragraphs** in an academic essay consist of the following elements, the definitions for which are elaborated below:

1. Topic Sentence
  2. Explanation or Expansion
  3. Examples/Evidence
  4. Analysis of Examples/Evidence
  5. Transitions
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**1. Topic sentence:** a summary sentence of the paragraph it is introducing: a mini thesis for the paragraph.

- The topic sentence explicitly moves the argument of your **thesis forward**
- In other words, each topic sentence should somehow link back to the “In this essay, I argue...” signposting from your introductory paragraph.

**2. Explanation or Expansion:** an elaboration of what your topic sentence means

- This is easier than it sounds because you can use **metacommentary templates** from *They Say, I Say* to successfully elaborate on your position
- The explanation or expansion of your topic sentence can also contain background information, but it must appear **before** you give evidence

**3. Evidence:** Direct quotations and/or paraphrases from the text

- Perhaps the easiest element of the body paragraph because it’s usually the first thing you think of when you plan a paper
- **Remember:** evidence in the form of **quotations** need to be contextualized with the **quotation sandwich** format!

- 4. Analysis of Evidence:** the “so what? who cares?” element of the paragraph that tells the reader **why** and **how** the evidence they’ve chosen is significant
- You need to make clear to the reader what you as a writer get from the examples
  - Answer these questions in your analysis and you’ll be in good shape:
    - Why should the reader care?
    - What does this say about the larger context of the topic about which you’re writing (i.e., what does this example from Hesiod suggest about Greek civilization)?
    - What does this say to further the thesis?
- 5. Transition:** finish the paragraph with a signal toward your next paragraph
- A sentence or two that directly leads into your next topic sentence
  - Oftentimes, you will find that your paragraphs need restructuring based on the natural flow of your evidence and argument building
  - In other words, what was originally your third paragraph in a draft might end up as your fifth because you need to build up to the complexity of the argument you are making

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**Continue to p. 3 of this handout for an annotated example of a well-executed body paragraph.**

## Anatomy of Body Paragraphs in Academic Essays

**Claim/Thesis:** In Amy Tan's short story "Two Kinds," the author leads us on a journey of a mother's expectations for her daughter to become a prodigy are too high and willingly not obtainable. Upon a closer analysis of the writing, one can argue that the mother does not allow her daughter to become her own person. She instills all hopes of her lost children on her sole child. In due course this short story looks at whether or not the pressure from the mother hinders the daughter.

### Body Paragraph based on claim/thesis:

(1) Upon a further examination, the mother's constant pressure on the daughter was beginning to wear on her. (2) Jing-mei's mother would consistently give her daughter tests and the expectations to succeed were high. (3) As the daughter states right after she failed to perform well at the climatic piano recital "After seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations" (Tan 1152). (4) After seeing the dissatisfaction from her mother's face, the hopes for success began to eat away at her. It began to tear at the daughter's emotional state, the narrator "began to die" on the inside. (5) The consistent disappointment pushes the daughter to the point where she would no longer play by her mother's expectations. She decides to rebel, to never become someone she is not.

**1. Topic Sentence:** "Upon a further examination, the mother's constant pressure on the daughter was beginning to wear on her."

- **The sentence clearly states what the paragraph will explain: the effect that the mother character's behavior has on the daughter.**

**2. Explanation or Expansion:** "Jing-mei's mother would consistently give her daughter tests and the expectations to succeed were high."

- **This sentence continues the previous sentence's thought by giving a bit more information about the mother-daughter relationship: tests and performance**

**3. Evidence:** "As the daughter states right after she failed to perform well at the climatic piano recital 'After seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations' (Tan 1152)."

**The evidence in this passage follows the Quotation Sandwich model from TSIS:**

- **Introducing the quotation through context:** The writer is pointing us to the point in the text where the recital takes place
- **The quotation itself:** "After seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations" (Tan 1152).

**4. Analysis of Evidence (last element of quotation sandwich, the "so what, who cares?"):** "After seeing the dissatisfaction from her mother's face, the tests and hopes for success, began to eat away at her. It began to tear at the daughter's emotional state, the narrator 'began to die' on the inside."

- **The essay writer tells us what just happened in the quotation, with added info:** The daughter sees the mother's expression and makes clear that the reader is meant to interpret the evidence as taking a psychological toll on the narrator. Notice how the writer uses an **embedded quotation** from the text to show that the writer's interpretation can be found directly in the text itself (lends credibility).

**5. Transition sentence to next paragraph:** "The consistent disappointment pushes the daughter to the point where she would no longer play by her mother's expectations. She decides to rebel, to never become someone she is not."

- **While we don't see the next paragraph, we presumably know its contents:** Evidence that the narrator (the daughter) of the story will rebel and will go through great lengths to separate her individual identity from her mother's. This paragraph will follow the same format listed above, with different content.