

Outlining Body Paragraphs

Directions: You have selected your text, researched topics, narrowed the focus of your topic, found examples for analysis, identified patterns in the textual analysis, and created a tentative thesis. Now you have to determine the structure of your paper.

Avoid a simplistic topic that doesn't require a set development of ideas. A simplistic topic will have an unsophisticated argument where the body paragraph order doesn't matter. In a simplistic argument, each paragraph focuses on a different sub-claim that independently proves the thesis. The order of these paragraphs doesn't matter, because the ideas don't build off one another.

Example: Fitzgerald introduces his characters through physical descriptions of their homes.

Body Paragraph 1: Nick's house, compared to Gatsby

Body Paragraph 2: Gatsby's house, appearance of looking old

Body Paragraph 3: Tom's house, refinement

Write a more elevated thesis claim, meaning that you need to prove multiple points before you can reach the final analysis in your paper. In a sophisticated idea, you will have to build your argument in order – you will prove one claim before you can prove the next claim.

Example: Fitzgerald introduces his characters through physical descriptions of their homes to expose society's materialistic valuations of people, while simultaneously undercutting his theme by romanticizing Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and gestures for Daisy.

Body Paragraphs 1-2: Fitzgerald uses homes to define characters – Nick introduces the three male characters through their homes.

Body Paragraph 3: Since the homes reflect the characters' personalities and function as extensions of themselves, Nick's commentary on the homes reveals society's valuation of these characters.

Body Paragraph 4: Despite exposing society's materialism, Fitzgerald romanticizes Gatsby's lifestyle through his grand parties and popularity.

Step by Step Process to Determine Your Paper Structure

Step 1: Make sure that you have an elevated idea

Step 2: Number the parts in your tentative thesis

Step 3: Write mini-thesis statements for each body paragraph topic – topics should not be more than a sentence

Step 4: Rewrite mini-thesis statements to show the relationship between the paragraphs

Step 5: Check to see if paragraphs actually build off of one another or if they can be interchanged. It is okay for some paragraphs to be interchangeable (like paragraphs 1-2 in the example above)

Step 6: Share the structure of your paper with a partner and see if it makes sense to them