

8

The Structure of an Essay

In this unit, you will learn ...

- the definition of an essay.
- how to format an essay.
- how to write a thesis statement.

➤ What is an essay?

An essay is a group of paragraphs written about a single topic and a central main idea. It must have at least three paragraphs, but a five-paragraph essay is a common length for academic writing.

The structure of an essay

➤ The three main parts of an essay

The introduction

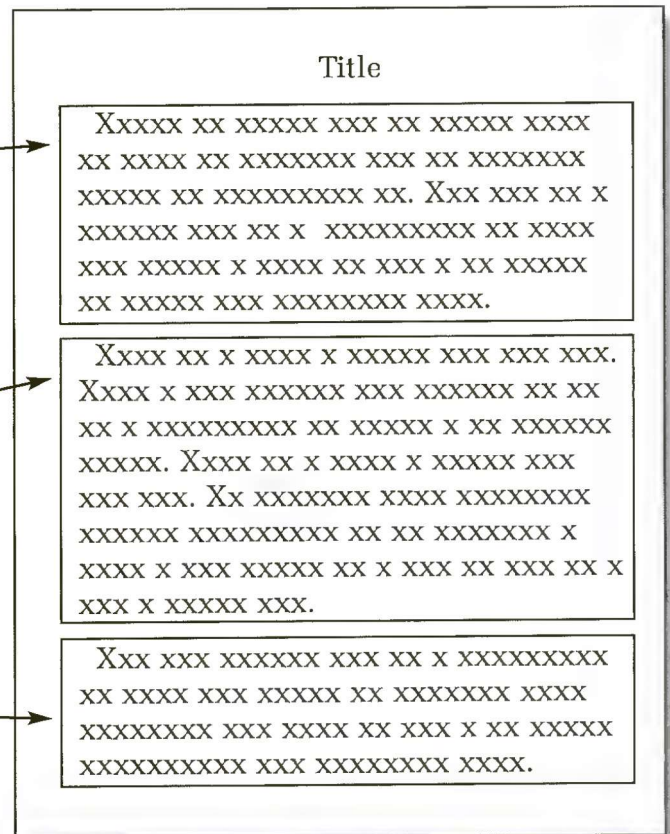
This is the first paragraph of an essay. It explains the topic with general ideas. It also has a *thesis statement*. This is a sentence that gives the main idea. It usually comes at or near the end of the paragraph.

The main body

These are the paragraphs that explain and support the thesis statement and come between the introduction and the conclusion. There must be one or more paragraphs in the main body of an essay.

The conclusion

This is the last paragraph of an essay. It summarises or restates the thesis and the supporting ideas of the essay.



➤ How to format an essay

1. Use double spacing (leave a blank line between each line of writing).
2. Leave 2.5 centimeters (1 inch) of space on the sides, and the top and bottom of the page. This space is called the *margin*.
3. If you type your essay, start the first line of each paragraph with five spaces (one tab). This is called *indenting*. If you write by hand, indent about 2 centimeters ($\frac{3}{4}$ inch). Alternatively, paragraphs can begin at the left-hand margin with no indentation. However, you must then leave one line space between each paragraph.
4. Put the title of your essay at the top of the first page in the centre.

I Label the three parts of this essay: introduction, main body paragraphs, and conclusion.**Changing English: the African American Influence**

If you ask average Americans where their language comes from, they will probably say 'England'. However, English vocabulary has also been influenced by other countries and groups of people. Some words are borrowed from other languages, such as *typhoon*, which originally came from the Chinese word, 'tai-fung', meaning 'big wind'. *Skunk*, the name of a small, smelly, black-and-white animal, came to English from a Native American language. African Americans, too, have both contributed new words to English and changed the meanings of some existing words.

African Americans, many of whose ancestors were brought to the States as slaves hundreds of years ago, have introduced a number of words to English from languages that they spoke in their native countries. The common English word *OK* is used around the world today, but it was not always part of English vocabulary. One theory is that slaves in America used a phrase in their own language that sounded like *OK* to mean 'all right'. Americans heard the phrase and started using it. Today, almost everyone in the world uses *OK* to mean 'all right'. Another good example of a 'new' word is the word *jazz*. African American musicians living in the United States began playing jazz music in the city of New Orleans, and they used the word *jass* or *jazz* to describe the music and certain kinds of dancing. No one is sure where the word originally came from, but as jazz music became more and more popular, the word *jazz* became a common English word.

The meanings of words sometimes change over time. The word *cool* is a good example. *Cool* has been used in English for a long time to describe a temperature that is 'not warm but not too cold' or to describe a person who is 'calm or unemotional'. However, an additional meaning was given to the word *cool* in the past 100 years. Just like the word *jazz*, African American musicians used the word *cool* to describe the music they were playing. For them, *cool* meant 'good'. As jazz music and other forms of music played by African American musicians became popular, more and more people started to use the word *cool* in conversation. Today, it is still a commonly used word, especially by younger people, to mean 'good' or 'great'. A word with the opposite meaning of *cool* is *square*. *Square* is, of course, a shape, but it also is used to describe a person who is not cool. This may be because a person who is too old-fashioned and not flexible is like a shape with four straight sides and four corners.

English owes some of its interesting and colourful vocabulary to African Americans. Existing ethnic groups in the United States as well as new immigrants will surely continue to bring new words to English and give fresh meanings to existing words. Who knows what the 'cool' words of tomorrow will be?

Thesis statements

➤ What is a thesis statement?

The *thesis statement* is the sentence that tells the main idea of the whole essay. It can be compared to a topic sentence, which gives the main idea of a paragraph. It usually comes at or near the end of the introductory paragraph.

2 Look at the essay in exercise 1 on page 57 again. Underline the thesis statement.

3 In these introductory paragraphs, underline the thesis statement. Then circle the topic and draw another line under the main idea in each thesis statement. Share your answers with a partner.

a.

Before I travelled to the UK last year, I thought that British food was just fish and chips, roast beef, apple pie, rice pudding and endless cups of tea. These foods are popular in Britain, but during my travels, I discovered that there is so much more to eating in the UK. People from all over the world have made their home in Britain, and they have brought with them their own food. Even in small towns, you can find Chinese, Indian and Italian restaurants, amongst others. The UK can be divided into different regions that each has its own characteristic foods influenced by the culture of the people who live there.

b.

Everybody knows the koala, that sweet Australian animal that resembles a teddy bear. Although koalas look like toys, they are actually strong climbers and spend their days in the treetops. Mother koalas carry their babies around from tree to tree in a pouch, or pocket, on their stomach. Although there were millions of koalas in Australia in the past, they are now a protected species of animal. As a result of human population growth, deforestation and hunting, the number of koalas has declined.



c.

Taoism is an ancient philosophy from Asia that places great importance on the natural world. Taoists believe that spirit can be found in every person or thing, living or non-living. For the Taoist, even a mountain or a stone contains spirit. Lao Tsu, a Taoist writer and philosopher, said, 'People follow earth. Earth follows heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. The Tao follows what is natural'. For thousands of years in China and other Asian countries, gardens have been an important way to create a place where people can feel the spirit of the natural world. Creating a Taoist garden is an art. No two Taoist gardens are exactly alike, but all Taoist gardens include four essential elements: water, mountains, buildings and bridges.

➤ Writing a strong thesis statement

- A thesis statement gives the author's opinion or states an important idea about the topic. It should give an idea that can be discussed and explained with supporting ideas:

The qualifications for getting into university in my country are unreasonable.

When studying a foreign language, there are several ways to improve your use of the language.

These are strong thesis statements. They can be discussed or explained.

- A thesis statement should not be a sentence that only gives a fact about the topic:
In the Northern Hemisphere, the summer months are warmer than the winter months.
This is not a strong thesis statement. It cannot be discussed or argued about.

- A thesis statement should not state two sides of an argument equally:

There are advantages and disadvantages to using nuclear power.

This could be a topic sentence, but it is not a thesis statement. It gives two sides of an argument without giving a clear opinion of support or disagreement. It could be revised like this:

Although there are some advantages, using nuclear power has many disadvantages and should not be a part of our country's energy plan.

This is a strong thesis statement. It clearly gives the writer's opinion about nuclear power.

4 Read these thesis statements below. Write ✓ (strong thesis statement), F (fact only—a weak thesis statement), or N (no clear opinion—a weak thesis statement).

- The top government official in my country is the prime minister.
- Some people prefer digital cameras, while others like traditional cameras.
- India became an independent country in 1947.
- To be a successful student, good study habits are more important than intelligence.
- There are several advantages of owning a car, but there are also many disadvantages.
- Half of the families in my country own a house.
- Using public transport would be one of the best ways to solve the traffic and pollution problems in cities around the world.
- While travelling, staying in a hotel offers more comfort, but sleeping in a tent is less expensive.
- Classical music concerts are very popular in my country.
- In order to create a successful advertisement, it is necessary to consider three issues: who should be targeted, where the advert should be placed, and what type of advert should be made.

Writing thesis statements

☞ How to connect the thesis statement and the essay

The paragraphs in the main body of an essay should always explain the thesis statement. In addition, each paragraph in the main body should discuss *one* part of the thesis. Look at the following thesis statement. The topics to be discussed are underlined:

To create a successful advertisement, it is necessary for advertisers to answer three questions: What are we selling?, Who are we selling it to?, and How can we make people want to buy it?

Possible topic sentences for each paragraph in the main body:

1. *The first step in creating a successful advertisement is to completely understand the product that is being sold and how it can be used.*
2. *A second important part of creating an advertisement is deciding who is expected to buy the product.*
3. *Finally, a way must be found to create an ad that will make people want to buy the product.*



9 Outlining an Essay

In this unit, you will learn ...

- the purpose of an outline.
- how to write an outline.

➤ What is an outline?

An outline is a list of the information you will put in your essay. You can see an example of an outline on page 65.

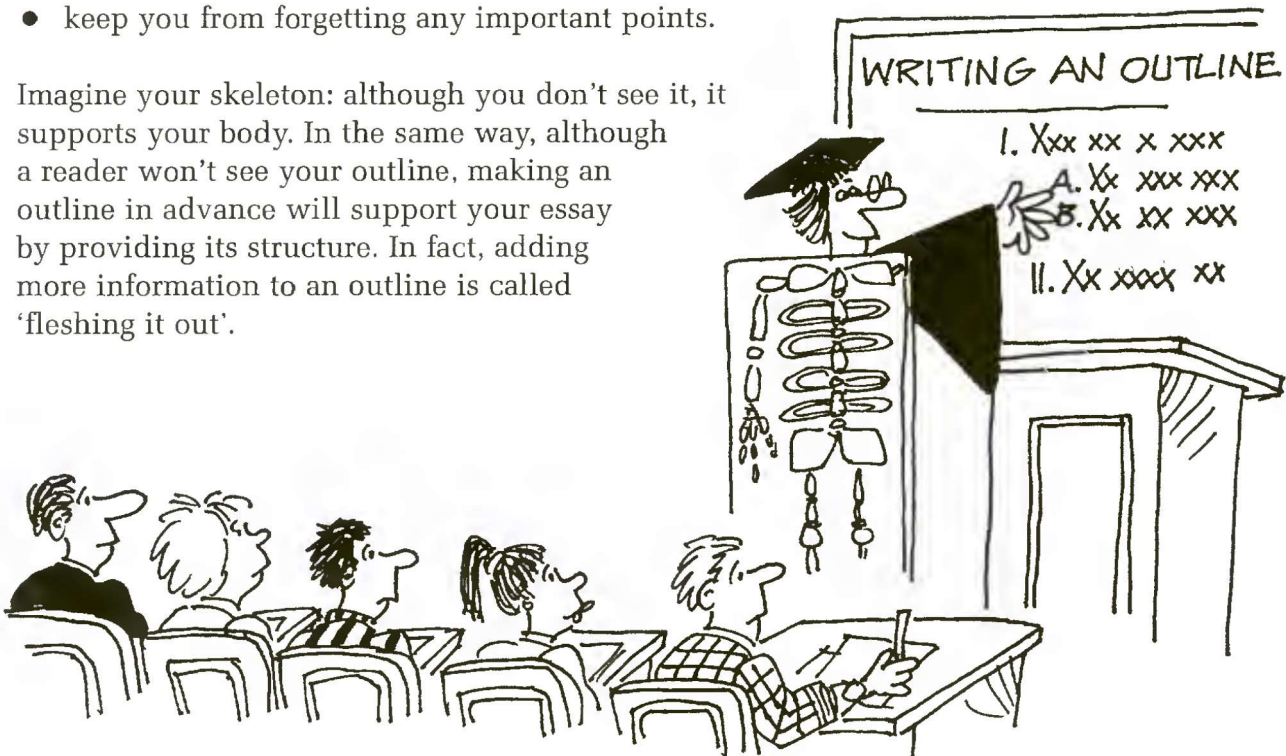
An outline ...

- begins with the essay's thesis statement.
- shows the organisation of the essay.
- tells what ideas you will discuss and shows which ideas will come first, second, and so on.
- ends with the essay's conclusion.

Writing an outline before you write an essay will ...

- show you what to write before you actually begin writing.
- help make your essay well organised and clearly focused.
- keep you from forgetting any important points.

Imagine your skeleton: although you don't see it, it supports your body. In the same way, although a reader won't see your outline, making an outline in advance will support your essay by providing its structure. In fact, adding more information to an outline is called 'fleshing it out'.



Looking at an outline

- I** Read the outline on page 65. Answer the questions.
- What will the thesis statement of the essay be?
 - How many paragraphs will there be in the main body?
 - How many supporting points will the third paragraph have? What will they be?
 - How many details will the fourth paragraph have? What will they be?

Writing an outline

➤ How to write an outline

Before writing an outline, you must go through the usual process of gathering ideas, editing them, and deciding on a topic for your writing. Writing an outline can be a very useful way of organising your ideas and seeing how they will work together.

To show how the ideas work together, number them. To avoid confusion, use several different types of numbers and letters to show the organisation of the ideas. Use Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, VI, etc.) for your essay's main ideas: your introduction and thesis statement, your main body paragraphs, and your conclusion. Write all of these first, before going into more detail anywhere.

- I. Introduction
- II. First main idea
- III. Second main idea
- IV. Third main idea
- V. Conclusion

Next, fill in more information for the paragraphs in the main body by using capital Roman letters (A, B, C, etc.). Use one letter for each supporting idea in your main body paragraph. Complete this information for each paragraph in the main body before going into more detail.

- I. Introduction
- II. First main idea
 - A. First supporting point
 - B. Second supporting point
 - ... and so on.

Finally, use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) to give details for your supporting points. Not every supporting point will have details, and some points will have several. It is not important to have the same number of details for every supporting point.

- I. Introduction
- II. First main idea
 - A. First supporting point
 1. First detail
 2. Second detail
 - B. Second supporting point
 1. First detail
 2. Second detail
 - ... and so on.

Don't Support Nuclear Energy!

- I. Nuclear power is not a good energy source for the world.
- II. Very expensive
 - A. Nuclear fuel is expensive
 - B. Nuclear power stations are expensive to build and operate
 - 1. Cost of construction
 - 2. Cost of training workers
 - 3. Cost of safety features
- III. Nuclear materials are not safe
 - A. Nuclear fuels are dangerous
 - 1. Mining fuels produces radioactive gas
 - 2. Working with radioactive fuels can harm workers
 - B. Nuclear waste products are dangerous
 - 1. Very radioactive
 - 2. Difficult to dispose of or store safely
- IV. There is a great possibility of accidents
 - A. Nuclear power stations can fail
 - 1. Three Mile Island, USA (1979)
 - 2. Tarapur, India (1992)
 - 3. Darlington, Canada (1992)
 - B. Workers can make mistakes
 - 1. Chernobyl, USSR (1986)
 - 2. Kola, Russia (1991)
 - 3. Tokaimura, Japan (1999)
 - C. Natural disasters can occur
 - 1. Earthquake: Kozloduy, Bulgaria (1977)
 - 2. Tornado: Moruroa, the Pacific (1981)
- V. Because of the cost and the danger, the world should develop different types of energy to replace nuclear power.



- 2 Fill in this outline for the essay in Unit 8, exercise 1 on page 57. Then compare with a partner.

The Changing Vocabulary of English

- I. Thesis statement:
- II. Words introduced by
- A.
1. From an African language
 2. Now used all over the world to mean
- B. Jazz
1. Came from
 2. Exact origin unknown
- III.
- A. Cool
1.
 2. New meanings
- B.
1. Original meaning
 2.
- IV.: Existing ethnic groups in the United States as well as new immigrants will certainly continue to bring new words to English and give fresh meanings to existing words.



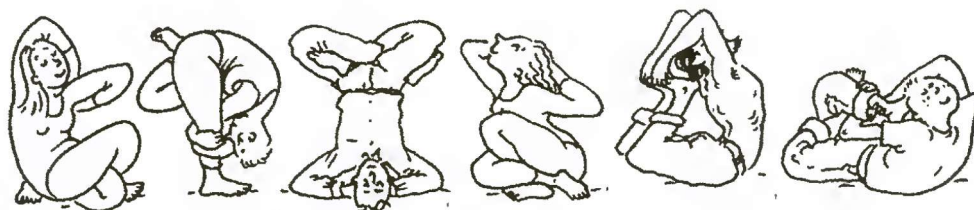
3 Label each statement T for thesis statement, M for main idea, S for supporting point, or C for conclusion.

Title: The Benefits of Yoga

- a. Develops clear thinking
- b. Physical benefits
- c. Improves concentration
- d. Reduces fear, anger, and worry
- e. Mental benefits
- f. Improves blood circulation
- g. Improves digestion
- h. Helps you feel calm and peaceful
- i. Develops self-confidence
- j. Doing yoga regularly can be good for your mind, your body, and your emotions.
- k. Makes you strong and flexible
- l. Therefore, to build mental, physical, and emotional health, consider doing yoga.
- m. Emotional benefits

4 Arrange the ideas in exercise 3 above into an outline. Compare your finished outline with a partner.

- I.
- II.
 - A.
 - B.
- III.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
- IV.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
- V.



Evaluating an outline

➤ The outline checklist

Before you start writing your essay, check your outline for organisation, support, and topic development. If possible, ask a friend or your teacher to check your outline too.

Organisation

- paragraphs in the right order
- supporting points and details in the right order

Support

- each main idea related to the thesis statement
- each supporting point related to the paragraph's main idea
- each detail related to the paragraph's supporting points

Topic development

- enough (and not too many) main ideas to develop the thesis statement
- enough (and not too many) supporting points for each main point
- enough (and not too many) details for each supporting point

- 5** With a partner, check the outline on page 69 for organisation, support, and topic development. What should the author add, subtract, or change in this outline? Share your ideas with another pair. Did you make the same recommendations?

In 1848, gold was discovered in California. People from all over the world rushed to California to look for gold—they wanted to become rich. This was called ‘the gold rush’.



The Effects of the California Gold Rush on the City of San Francisco

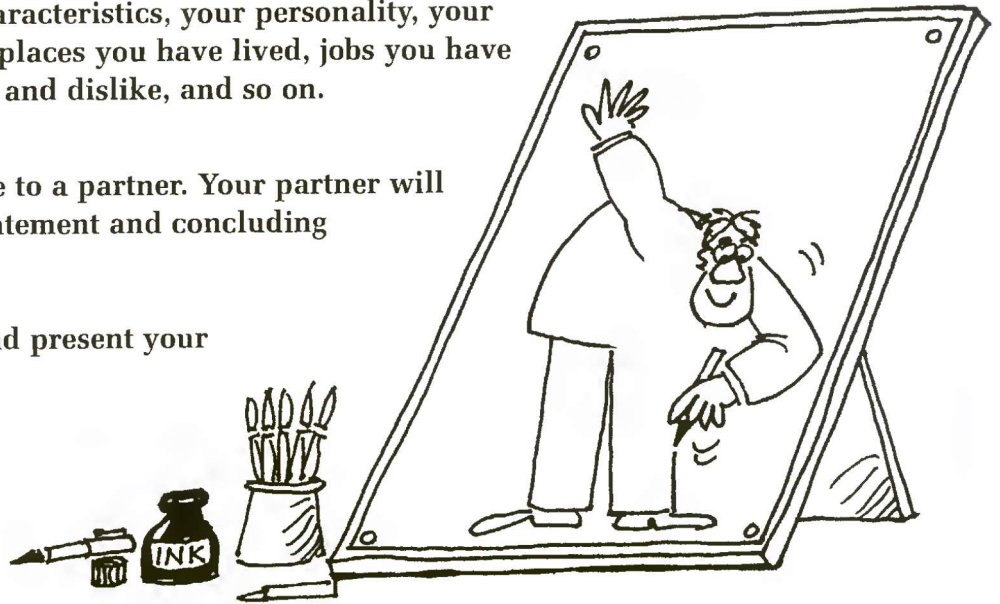
- I. The California gold rush changed San Francisco in ways that we can still see today.
- II. History of the gold rush
 - A. 1848
 1. Gold was discovered near San Francisco
 2. The US president tells the country there's gold in California
 - B. 1864: the gold rush ends
 - C. 1849: the gold rush begins as people from all over the world go to California to look for gold. Gold is very easy to find.
 - D. 1850s: gold becomes more difficult to find; big, expensive machines are now needed to find gold
 - E. Gold rushes in other countries
 1. Australia (1851–53)
 2. South Africa (1884)
 3. Canada (1897–98)
- III. Effects on San Francisco today
 - A. People still come to San Francisco hoping to get rich
 1. Computer industry
 - B. Sightseeing is very popular in San Francisco
 - C. San Francisco is still an expensive city
 1. Houses and land
 2. Food and clothing
 3. Many new fast-food restaurants sell cheap hamburgers
 - D. Still problems in the city
 - E. Technological development is still important
 - F. There is no gold mining today
 - G. Character of San Francisco today
- IV. Changes in California in the 1800s
 - A. Population increased—more than 40,000 people moved to California in 1848–50
 - B. Everything became more expensive
 1. Houses and land
 - C. Problems with crime and violence
 - D. Technology to find gold improved
- V. The special personality of San Francisco can be traced in part to the famous gold rush of the 1800s.



- 6 Look at the thesis statement and topic sentences you wrote in Unit 8, exercise 8 on page 62. Write an outline for your essay. Then write the essay.
- 7 Exchange the essay you wrote for exercise 6 above with a partner. As you read your partner's essay, write an outline of the main ideas, supporting points, and details. Your partner will outline your essay. Discuss the outlines.

Review

- 8 Write a simple outline of yourself or your life. First, outline only the main body paragraphs. Your main ideas could include physical characteristics, your personality, your habits, your family, places you have lived, jobs you have had, things you like and dislike, and so on.
- 9 Explain your outline to a partner. Your partner will then add a thesis statement and concluding statement.
- 10 Join another pair and present your complete outlines.



10 Introductions and Conclusions

In this unit, you will learn about ...

- the purpose of an introduction.
- types of information in introductions.
- the purpose of a conclusion.
- techniques for writing conclusions.

➤ The importance of introductions and conclusions

Unit 8 explained that the introduction and the conclusion are two of the three main parts of an essay. Without an introduction and a conclusion, an essay is just a group of paragraphs. The introduction and the conclusion work together to make the topic and main ideas of the essay clear to the reader.

The introduction

➤ What is an introduction?

The first paragraph of an essay, as you learned in Unit 8, is called the introduction. The introduction ...

- is usually five to ten sentences.
- catches the reader's interest.
- gives the general topic of the essay.
- gives background information about the topic.
- states the main point (the thesis statement) of the essay.

The introduction is often organised by giving the most general ideas first and then leading to the most specific idea, which is the thesis statement, like this:

