

# What Does an Essay Look Like?

Although there are many effective ways to write an essay, one standard method in schools is the five-paragraph essay. All Fairfield students should become proficient with this format.

Heading (Name, Date, Period)

## Title

### *Introductory Paragraph*

I. **Capture attention** and introduce your topic starting with one or a combination of the following: a quotation, an alarming fact, an intriguing question, or a disagreement with a common belief. **Funnel your ideas** down to a specific point. At the end of the first paragraph, **clearly state your thesis**.

### *Developmental Paragraph #1*

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers one element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1<sup>st</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
    - Transition
- **2<sup>nd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details that support example
    - Transition
- **3<sup>rd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

### *Developmental Paragraph #2*

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers a second element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1<sup>st</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
    - Transition
- **2<sup>nd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details that support example
    - Transition
- **3<sup>rd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

### *Developmental Paragraph #3*

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers a third element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1<sup>st</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
    - Transition
- **2<sup>nd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details that support example
    - Transition
- **3<sup>rd</sup> general example**
  - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

### *Concluding Paragraph*

Begin with a summary sentence in which you **restate the thesis in different words**. Be convincing! Then **broaden out again to general ideas** (like those you started with in your first paragraph). Use any or a combination of the following: quotation, conclusions drawn, summary of major points. **DO NOT** add new ideas. Conclude with a powerful final sentence that solidifies your thesis in the reader's mind.

# Sample Essay

---

Francis Falcon  
August 26, 2002  
Period 1

## Three Simple Steps to Writing an Essay

You stare in horror at the vastness of the empty page! The blinding whiteness stares back, offering nothing. The assignment is due tomorrow, but you can't seem to get started. Does this happen to you when you try to write an essay for a class? If so, fear no more because once you understand a few simple concepts, writing school essays is a snap. The three most important things you must include in a scholarly essay are **an introduction that contains a thesis**, **supporting paragraphs that prove or explain your thesis**, and **a conclusion that restates your thesis**. Essays that contain a clear thesis, supporting paragraphs, and a solid conclusion are more effective and will earn higher grades at Fairfield.

Every essay must contain a thesis. A thesis is a complete sentence that clearly states what your writing will prove or explain. It usually appears near the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis is important for many reasons, the most important of which is that a clear thesis shows that you actually have something to say. Many writing problems arise when students sit down to write, but they haven't thought about the topic, and they don't actually have anything to say about it. Writing that does not contain a thesis is often just a jumbled series of unrelated thoughts that may (or may not) relate to some general topic. Such writing has no point to make and is usually boring and unmemorable. A clear thesis statement is a writer's best friend because it gives direction to the writing. It answers the question "What are you trying to say?" Keeping your thesis in mind as you write forces you to stick to your topic and present only that information that your audience needs to know. The thesis of this essay is stated in the final sentence of the first paragraph. A clear thesis is a vital part of any school essay, but it is not the only thing you need.

Every essay must contain supporting paragraphs that support the thesis. A supporting paragraph contains information that proves or explains some aspect of your thesis. For example, in this essay there is a paragraph about each of the three elements of a good essay: thesis, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. In order to write an effective supporting paragraph, you must first have a topic sentence. A topic sentence is to a paragraph what a thesis is to an essay: it is what all the details in the paragraph help prove or explain. The three body paragraphs in this essay (this one, the one above it, and the one below it) begin with topic sentences. This is a good format to follow because then the reader knows from the beginning of the paragraph what you are going to discuss in the paragraph, and you (the writer) know what it is you should be writing about. Good paragraphs also contain plenty of details, examples, and evidence that prove the topic sentence. In order to express exactly what you mean, such details and examples are a must; without them, you do not communicate clearly. Your reader may misinterpret a vague generalization, and then you have not done your job as a writer, which is to express your meaning clearly. Also, make sure your supporting details and examples are specific! Do not write, "They always do stuff," when what you mean is "The sixth grade boys tease the girls at lunchtime." Notice how the first quoted example doesn't tell the reader anything; the second is very specific. If the body of your essay is made up of clear, specific details and examples, you are more than half way there.

Every essay must contain a conclusion paragraph. A conclusion paragraph serves three purposes. It restates the thesis in different words, briefly reminds the reader of the main points of the essay, and draws the writing to a powerful close, ideally with a memorable final statement that will stick in the reader's mind long after s/he is finished reading. The conclusion paragraph is actually somewhat like the introductory paragraph turned upside-down. The restatement of the thesis usually comes first, then the restatement of the main points, and finally a memorable clincher statement. Do not discuss new material in the conclusion paragraph. It is only to restate and summarize material that was presented in the body of the essay. If you have made it to the final paragraph of an essay assignment, you're job is practically done because you don't need to think of many new things to write; you just have to restate things you have already said. A good conclusion paragraph cements your ideas in the reader's mind.

In conclusion, a good essay contains three things: a thesis, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph like this one. The secret to writing a good school essay is simple: **say what you are going to say (introduction)**, **say it (body)**, **say what you said (conclusion)**. It may sound silly, but this is the basic format used in all scholarly publications at all levels. Learn it well, practice it often, and the horror of the empty page will haunt you no more.

# Essay Format

## A Visual Example

