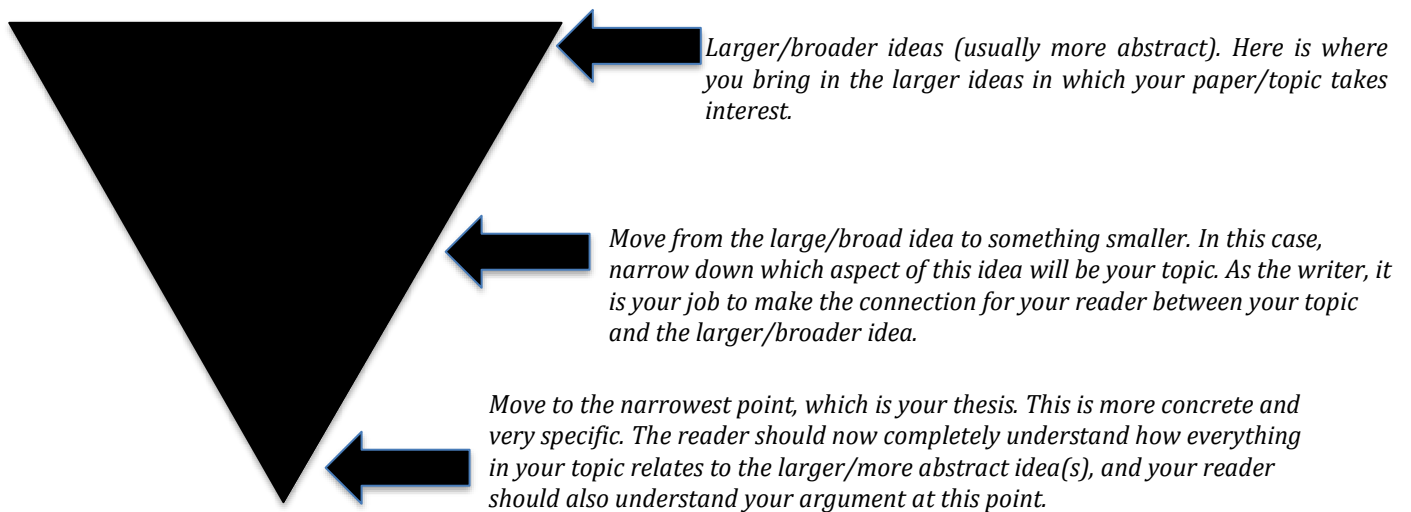


VISUAL GUIDE TO AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

THE INTRODUCTION

Some best practices for introductions include the following: identify the topic/controversy/issue at hand, explain it, and provide evidence that shows that the controversy is “real.” Then you enter the conversation with your particular perspective (that is, what side you are taking and why), which eventually leads you to your thesis. Oftentimes, though not always, an academic essay’s introduction should take the shape of an upside down triangle, starting off broad with larger, overarching messages/issues and increasingly gets more and more narrow until you hit your thesis.

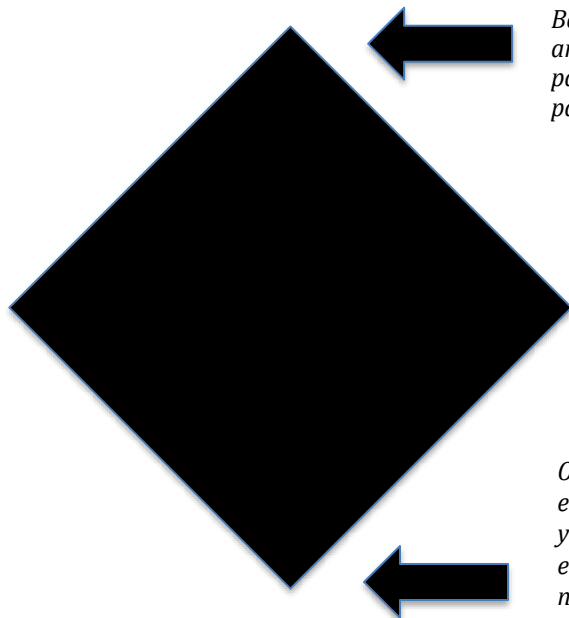


THE BODY

The body of your paper may take a variety of forms depending on what you believe is the most logical organization to argue what you put forth in your thesis. Like any good research essay, the bulk of it addresses what others have said, and therefore the art of your writing will show in how well you organize and explain the relation between your sources and your thesis.

This means that your essay’s body should be spent arguing for your thesis (and bringing in the different arguments/major points that develop your thesis). While most academic papers are made up of three supporting ideas, there is no concrete number of how many paragraphs constitute an essay’s body.

While an introduction takes the shape of an upside-down triangle, body paragraphs take the shape of diamonds. Many student writers mistakenly treat body paragraphs as upside-down triangles, but this is not an effective approach for structuring paragraphs.



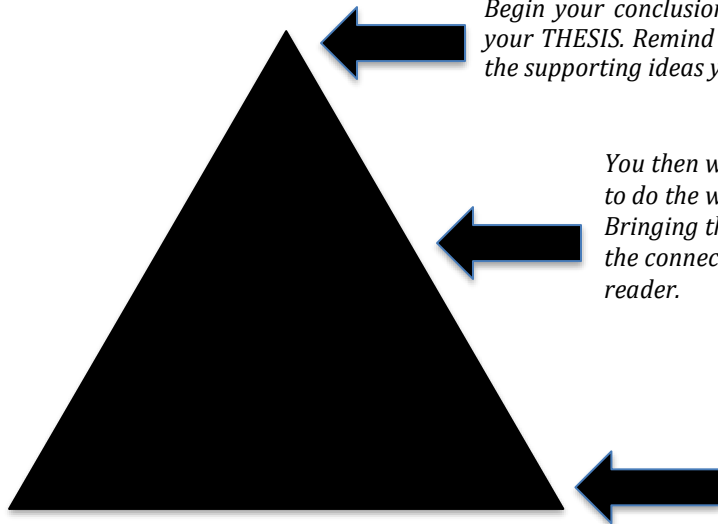
Body paragraphs begin with a TOPIC SENTENCE that specifically articulates EXACTLY what the reader can expect to find in that paragraph. Think of a topic sentence as the THESIS for the paragraph.

Body paragraphs then get wider in terms of their content/organization. The topic sentence should be supported in each body paragraph with evidence, further discussion, and analysis. The widening of the paragraph happens as you bring in relevant scholarship to support a major idea related to your thesis.

Once the conversation in the body paragraph has been widened with evidence, you should make it narrow again by returning to the idea in your thesis (as well as in your topic sentence). How does the wider evidence support your thesis and why? Body paragraphs also end narrowly because each main point should end in a clear, succinct way that allows smooth transition into the next topic sentence.

CONCLUSION

The most basic conclusion reiterates to/reminds the reader of your thesis and main points used to develop and argue for your thesis. Conclusions, however, can take many forms. A more advanced conclusion does more than reiterate; it offers additional thoughts and considerations to your reader, such as: implications of your research, suggestions for further investigation, or answering the “so what?” question, i.e. why the reader should care. Whereas an introduction takes the shape of an upside-down triangle, a conclusion takes the shape of a right-side-up triangle:



Begin your conclusion with a return to the narrow and concrete: your THESIS. Remind the reader about what this paper argues and the supporting ideas you bring in as a way to develop the thesis.

You then want to move outward from the narrow. This is a good place to do the work of framing, i.e. returning to the ideas of the intro. Bringing the same topics from the intro the conclusion helps to cement the connection between your topic and the larger message for your reader.

Whereas you began your introduction with the larger/broader/more abstract message, it is effective to end your essay in a similar way, by reinforcing to the reader how this topic/argument connects to important ideologies/philosophies/areas of contention (that is, larger messages). The essay genre is Socratic, meaning essays are, by definition, a small piece of a larger conversation on a specific topic. Thus, you want to leave your essay with a broad ending to allow other people the potential to join your conversation or add to it.