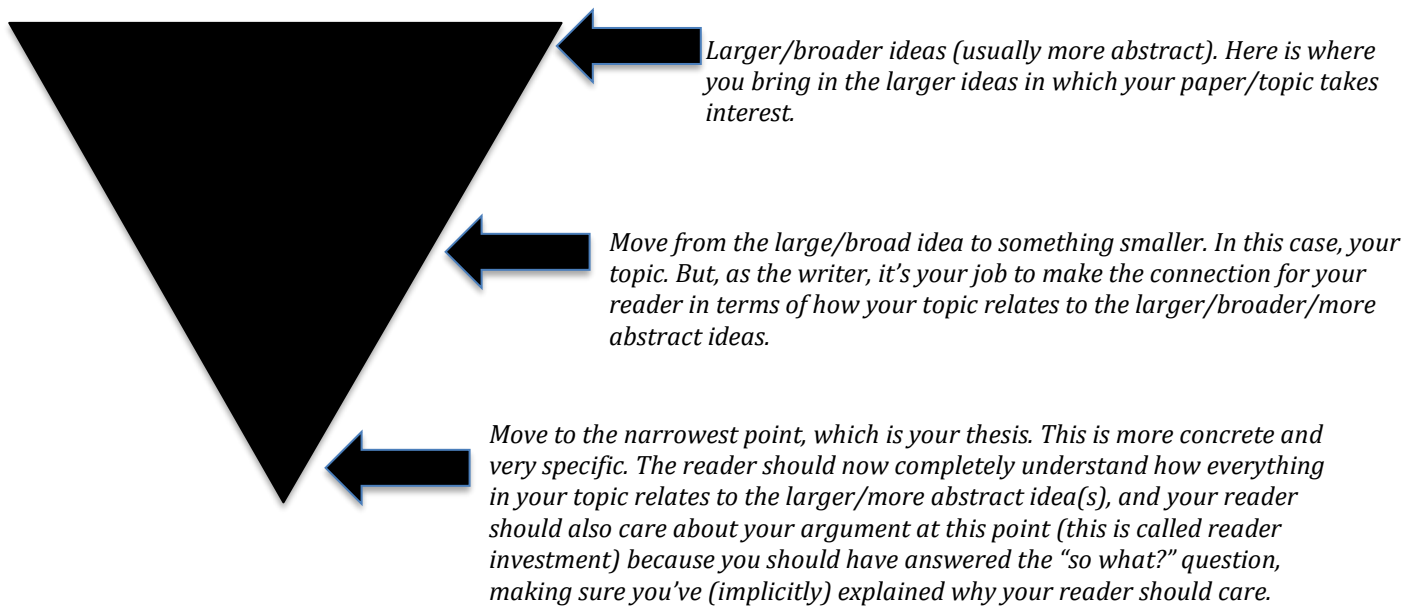


VISUAL GUIDE TO AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

THE INTRODUCTION

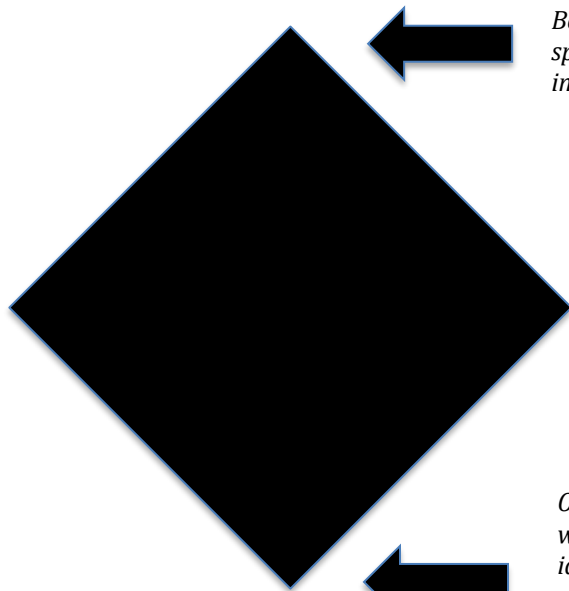
Some best practices for introductions include the following: identify the topic/controversy/issue at hand, explain it, and provide evidence that shows that the controversy is “real.” Then you enter the conversation with your particular perspective (that is, what side you are taking and why), which eventually 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 mostly spent arguing for your thesis (and bringing in the different arguments/major points that develop your thesis). While three paragraphs make up a basic academic paper, there is no concrete number of how many paragraphs constitute an essay’s body.

Whereas 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.



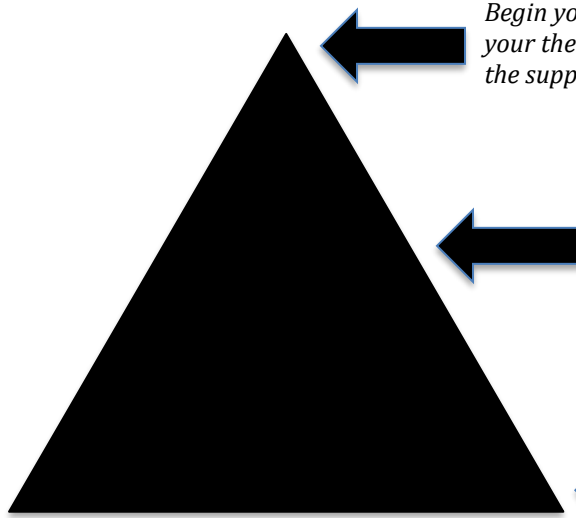
Body paragraphs begin VERY narrow with a topic sentence that specifically articulates EXACTLY what the reader can expect to find in that paragraph.

Body paragraphs then get wider in terms of their content/organization. The topic sentence, which works like a thesis for the paragraph, is then supported in the body paragraph with evidence, further discussion, analysis, etc. This is a widening of the topic since you are often bringing in outside voices 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 we sometimes end them by transitioning into the next body paragraph.

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 slightly more advanced conclusion is the further-thought conclusion, which offers additional thoughts and considerations to your reader that you didn't have time to discuss in your body but you believe are important for the topic/thesis. 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, that is, returning to ideas brought up in your essay's beginning. For example, ideas or topics treated by you in the introduction and then bringing these into 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's 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). By their genre, essays are Socratic, meaning they are a small piece of a larger conversation about something. 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. An essay is never an act in finality.