



## Essay Structure: The Basics

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An essay usually follows a standard format. At some point, you have probably encountered the “burger” or “5 paragraph” technique for writing papers. Below is a modified version of this technique that better suits university academic writing.

### Introduction

The introduction provides context and outlines the

# Structuring Your Body Paragraphs

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Each body paragraph should be structured so that your argument is central to the paragraph. There are two common ways to structure a body paragraph: The Shaffer formula and the MEAL plan.

The Shaffer Formula		The MEAL plan	
TS	Topic Sentence	Main Idea	M
CD	Concrete Detail	Example	E
CM	Commentary	Analysis	A
CM	Commentary	Link to Thesis	L
Concluding Sentence			

We can use both of these formulas together to construct a body paragraph. Remember that every essay is different and there is no overarching formula that encompasses all topics.

**Topic Sentence or Main Idea:** The topic sentence of a paragraph documents the main content of your paragraph. It defines what you will prove.

**Concrete Detail or Example:** In this sentence, you may need to either reinforce your main idea or use a supporting example from a source, either paraphrase or quotation.

**Commentary 1 or Analysis:** Analyze your example, and explain why it is important for your argument. If you cannot explain why the supporting evidence is relevant or important, then it may need to be reconsidered.

**Commentary 2 or Link to Topic Sentence:** Link back to your topic sentence. You may also need to further deconstruct your supporting evidence.

**Repeat:** You may require additional supporting evidence. If you do, use the same structure as outlined above.