

Writing Body Paragraphs

Step 1: Topic Sentence

Step 2: Using Evidence Properly

Step 3: Warrants/Commentary

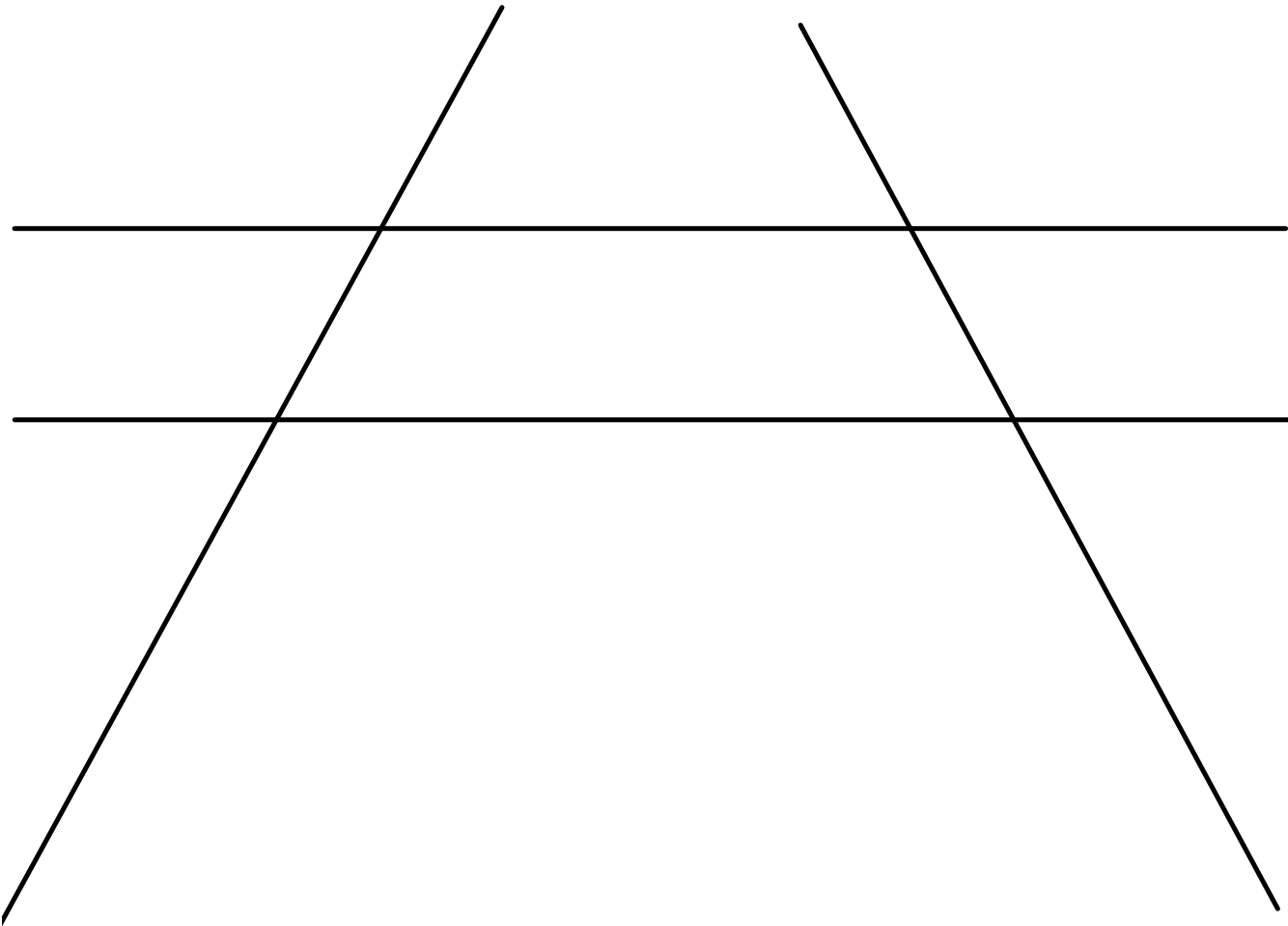
Some general rules...

- All body paragraphs will begin with a solid topic sentence that is an essential part of your paper's overall claim (last sentence of introduction).
- All body paragraphs must be complete—there will be no 2 or 3 sentence paragraphs.
- After the topic sentence, you will add evidence, quotes from the work, to support your topic (and claim).

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- All evidence will be worked naturally into your narrative.
- After quoting from the work, you will write several sentences interpreting how and why the evidence supports your topic (and claim) idea. This “commentary (warrant)” is your own opinion.
- Commentary should always be focused on what the author of the work was doing.

Body Paragraph Diagram



Body Paragraph Diagram

Topic Sentence
1 sentence

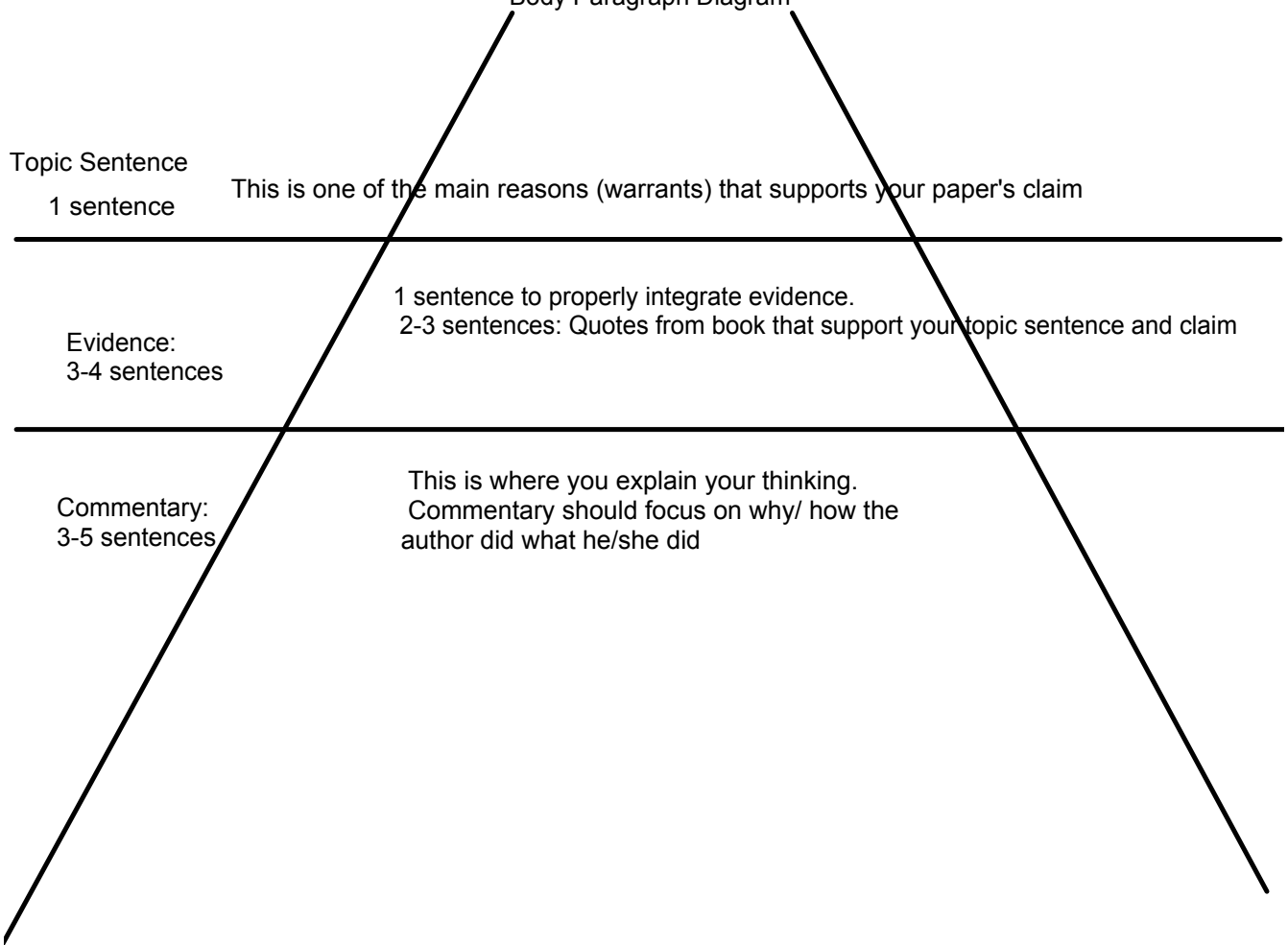
This is one of the main reasons (warrants) that supports your paper's claim

Evidence:
3-4 sentences

1 sentence to properly integrate evidence.
2-3 sentences: Quotes from book that support your topic sentence and claim

Commentary:
3-5 sentences

This is where you explain your thinking.
Commentary should focus on why/ how the author did what he/she did



Step one: Topic sentences.

- Topic sentences come from carefully examining your claim/thesis sentence.
- Look at the claim and ask yourself what three or four points must I make to support this claim? (These should be the reasons of your claim)
- What points can you support with quotes from the work?
- These ideas, essential sub-topics of your claim, are to become the topic sentences of your body paragraphs.

Examine your claim/thesis

- Look carefully at the following claim sentence:
- **Cisneros shows that Esperanza's childhood was both a time of joy and sorrow, that those experiences made her who she is, and helped her achieve her dream of owning her own house.**
- The topic sentence for the next paragraph should be a direct result of this sentence.
- It should be an essential point that must be shown with evidence and interpreted for the reader.

Cisneros shows that Esperanza's childhood was both a time of joy and sorrow, that those experiences made her who she is, and helped her achieve her dream of owning her own house.

- The claim introduces several interesting but undeveloped ideas
- What sub-points need to be proved
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
- These are the writer's opinion and they now need to be supported with evidence and explained by warrants.

Cisneros shows that Esperanza's childhood was both a time of joy and sorrow, that those experiences made her who she is, and helped her achieve her dream of owning her own house.

- The first topic sentence should address the first sub-point of your claim.
- It should state what you will be proving in the paragraph.
- It might look something like the following:

The happy moments of Esperanza's childhood changed her, and helped her leave Mango Street.

- This sentence is closely related to the claim/thesis.
- It flows logically from the claim/thesis.
- It moves the reader into the writer's thinking.
- But this sentence now needs evidence, quotes directly from the book.

Examine your claim:

-Identify 2-3 sub-points of your claim

Write a topic sentence using your claim

Important Note:

- An essay without direct quotes from the work does not provide me with adequate evidence that you have done the assigned reading.
- Nor does it provide me with the knowledge that you know how to use evidence in solidly written essays.
- Therefore, if you do not quote from the works you are discussing, you can expect to receive low marks on your essays.

Step two: Using evidence.

- You must quote directly from the work you are discussing. Paraphrasing does not count!
- This evidence must be very carefully chosen to show the reader the point made in the topic sentence.
- The evidence you use must be set naturally into your sentences.

The happy moments of Esperanza's childhood changed her, and helped her leave Mango Street.

- **Immediately after the topic sentence, you should provide evidence.**
- **The first step is introducing the quote.**
- **This may take a couple of sentences but should not run away with the paragraph.**

4 Ways to Properly Introduce Quotation (pages 27-29 in Reference Book)

1. Introduce the quotation with a complete sentence and a colon.

Example: In “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau states directly his purpose for going into the woods: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (54).

Example: Macbeth’s relationship to violence is clearly shown when he realizes he cannot stop killing, and that he in fact needs to kill more: “I am in blood/
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no
more,/Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.136-138).

4 Ways to Properly Introduce
Quotation
(pages 27-29 in Reference Book)

2. Use an introductory or explanatory phrase, but not a complete sentence, separated from the quotation with a comma.

Example: Early in the play Macbeth's first words highlight a major motif when he says, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38).

Example: King Duncan says, "There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face./He was a gentleman on whom I built/An Absolute trust" (1.4.11-14).

4 Ways to Properly Introduce
Quotation
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3. Make the quotation a part of your own sentence without any punctuation between your own words and the words you are quoting.

Example: Shakespeare states directly the consequences of violence when he writes that “It will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood” (3.4.122).

Example: King Duncan makes clear that appearances are not to be trusted because “There’s no art/To find the mind’s construction in the face” (1.4.11-12).

Example: According to the play “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.12).

Notice that the word “that” is used in three of the examples above, and when it is used as it is in the examples, “that” replaces the comma which would be necessary without “that” in the sentence. You usually have a choice, then, when you begin a sentence with a phrase such as “Shakespeare writes.” You can either add a comma after “writes” (Shakespeare writes, “quotation”) or you can add the word “that” with no comma (Shakespeare writes that “quotation.”)

4. Use short quotations-only a few words-as part of your own sentence.

Example: Shakespeare makes shows “blood will have blood” and that once a person starts on the road on violence that “Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.122 &137).

Example: Lady Macbeth, who tries to “beguile the time”, illustrates the effect of supernatural events on time when she feels “The future in the instant” (1.5.65 &1.5.59).

Example: Although Macbeth has never seen a day “so foul and fair”, he cannot anticipate the depths of double meanings or conceive of the “devil speaking true” (1.3.38 & 1.3.109).

When you integrate quotations in this way, you do not use any special punctuation. Instead, you should punctuate the sentence just as you would if all of the words were your own. No punctuation is needed in the sentences above in part because the sentences do not follow the pattern explained under number 1 and 2 above: there is not a complete sentence in front of the quotation, and a words such as “says,” “writes,” or “asks” does not appear directly in front of the quoted words.

Evidence Example

Esperanza faces many challenges that Cisneros presents in the first chapter, but the greatest and most enduring is accepting Mango Street as a part of her identity. Esperanza has struggled as her family has moved a lot in the past. She has always dreamed of a "house [that] would be white with trees around it" (4). She explains to the reader that the family's new house "isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it" (5). However, later in the book she learns that "[she] will always be Mango Street...[She] can't forget who [she] is"(105).

Note the following about the previous sentences...

- The evidence shows the connection between home and identity.
- The evidence quickly and efficiently makes its point.
- Notice the use of quotation marks and the in-text citation for the page number.

Step three: Commentary/Warrants

- The claim/thesis, the topic sentence, and the carefully chosen and well used evidence are just the beginning.
- Now you, the writer, must explain how the evidence supports both the topic sentence of the paragraph and the claim/thesis of the essay.
- All of this will be your opinion!

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- Look at the claim/thesis...
Cisneros' book emphasizes the ability of an individual to overcome great obstacles, and her first chapter is carefully constructed to show the connection between finding personal identity and happiness.
- Look at the topic sentence...
Esperanza faces many challenges that Cisneros presents in the first chapter, but the greatest and most enduring is accepting Mango Street as a part of her identity.
- Now it's your job to explain why/how Cisneros did this.

Great Big Fat Hairy Incredibly Important Tip!!!

- The best way to write commentary is make the author of the work the subject of most commentary sentences
- By doing this, you almost force yourself to discuss what the author was doing, how and why the author did what they did, and whether or not it worked.
- All of which is commentary!

Great Big Fat Hairy Incredibly Important Tip!!! (continued)

- DO NOT SUMMARIZE!!!!
- If you start babbling on about what this character was doing or that character was doing, you are summarizing the work.
- Interpretation (your opinion) is important; summary is stupid!

Commentary Example

- Notice in the following paragraph how the evidence is used.
- Notice that by far the biggest part of the paragraph is concerned with commentary, with explaining the writer's thinking.
- Notice how the last sentence hands off the thought to the next paragraph.

Esperanza faces many challenges that Cisneros presents in the first chapter, but the greatest and most enduring is accepting Mango Street as a part of her identity. Esperanza has struggled as her family has moved a lot in the past. She has always dreamed of a "house [that] would be white with trees around it" (4). She explains to the reader that the family's new house "isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it" (5). However, later in the book she learns that "[she] will always be Mango Street...[She] can't forget who [she] is"(105). From the opening page of the book Cisneros creates a connection between home and identity that will continue over the course of the novel. This connection is immediately developed because Esperanza must overcome the shame she feels for her house before she can tackle the real challenges in her life. The house on Mango Street may not be the home Esperanza wants, but it is a part of who she is. Sandra Cisneros wants the reader to understand how much of an impact where we are from has on us. Cisneros shows that it is only after a person accepts her home that she can face some of the more daunting hurdles in her life.

Warrants follow concrete detail (evidence) in your essays. When you provide a concrete detail (fact or quote) you must also provide an explanation of what that concrete detail means or what significance it has. Warrants/commentary are the “Do you see what I’m saying?” part of each paragraph. Think an attorney. Sometimes evidence is difficult for a jury to understand, so the lawyer must explain it to them and the lawyer must also show how this evidence proves her client is innocent. The same idea applies in writing an essay. You must provide evidence in your concrete detail, and then you must explain what that concrete means and how that information supports your claim.

This Shows Method

One way to write warrants is to use the “This shows” method. After your concrete detail, write two sentences that begin with “This shows.” Eventually, you will want to move on to more complex writing than “This shows,” but using this method will help you structure your paragraph.

Summary

- Strong topic sentences are a direct result of strong, clear claim/thesis sentences.
- Evidence should come early in the paragraph, be carefully chosen, and set naturally into the narrative.
- The majority of all body paragraphs should be interpretation that expresses the opinion of the writer of the essay.

