Body Paragraphs Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet

This study sheet will focus on how to build body paragraphs, specifically by using the Skeleton Method. The first part of this study sheet will cover the basic components of good body paragraphs, and the second part will delve into how to use the Skeleton Method when writing your own paragraphs. This study sheet builds off of what was discussed in the Creating an Outline Study Sheet, so it may be beneficial to go back and read over that before beginning this one.

Components of Body Paragraphs

This section needs a preface. When we are talking about body paragraphs, we are referring to body paragraphs that are found in typical academic essays. These are the paragraphs that are not a part of your introduction or conclusion, rather they make up the “body” of your paper.

Different types of writing are going to have paragraphs that are structured differently than in academic papers. For instance, in fiction writing, a paragraph can be focused on as many things or as few things as the writer desires. The composition is completely up to the writer and their particular writing style. In journalistic writing, a paragraph is going to be more cut and dry, focused solely on the facts, and extremely limited as far as flowery language goes. While all of these different types of paragraph composition are incredibly interesting, for our purposes, we will only be discussing body paragraphs in academic essays.

A good body paragraph in an essay should always focus on one central topic. That topic should also be narrow enough to talk about for a few sentences. (There isn’t a set length for paragraphs, but you want to be careful that you adequately cover the topic of that paragraph; be careful of it being too long or too short.) Once you start introducing too
many different ideas into one paragraph, it will get too lengthy, and you should consider making new paragraphs for the new ideas.

Several components make up good body paragraphs in academic essays. These include topic sentences, evidence, analysis, and a tie-back to the thesis. The following section of this study sheet will explain these components, as well as how you can use the Skeleton Method to organize each of those components and structure them into a completed paragraph.

The Skeleton Method

Think of the Skeleton Method as the process of you putting the flesh of your paper on the bones of an outline (kinda gross, but just roll with it). What the Skeleton Method does is break down the main components of an effective body paragraph, and lay them out in a way for you (the writer) to fill in each component with your own writing for your paper.

If you want a physical copy of the Skeleton Method Outline to work from, you will find a document in our Essay Writing Basics resources that you can download called “Body Paragraph Outline Template.” Just follow the steps below, and you’ll soon find yourself with a completed (and wonderfully organized) body paragraph.

1. Write Down Your Topic

Sometimes writing your topic as a question can be helpful, and then you can think of the purpose of your paper to be answering that question. For example, if I’m writing a paper on the benefits of space exploration, I might phrase my question like this: Do the benefits of the United States allocating funds towards space exploration outweigh the costs?

2. Create a Working Thesis

Just write down a rough draft of what you want your thesis to be. Make sure if you change your paper as you write that you amend your thesis to match it. Ex. The benefits of space exploration, including having a backup plan in case earth’s resources fail.
expanding territory, and knowing whether or not aliens exist, far outweigh the potential costs.

3. Determine the Large Areas and Small Areas of Concentration

Some essays are very long, and have sections that include multiple paragraphs. If your essay is shorter, you may only have individual paragraphs that each cover their own topic. Determine whether you need larger groupings of paragraphs into sections, determine what those sections and the paragraphs within them will cover, and if you don’t need larger section, just determine what your paragraphs will each cover.

4. Write the Topic Sentence(s)

Once you’ve decided the main topic for one of your paragraphs, you need to write a topic sentence that explains the main idea or claim that you are discussing in that paragraph. So, using my space exploration paper again, if my thesis states that the benefits of space exploration outweigh the costs, the topic sentence for one of my paragraphs might read: One reason space exploration should be invested in is because we need a backup plan in case a global catastrophe happens on earth.

5. Introduce Your Evidence

After you’ve made a claim, you need to back it up with evidence. Before you present your evidence, however, you need to introduce it. Once you’ve introduced a piece of evidence into your paper, you don’t need to do so again if you use it more than once. I might introduce a piece of evidence like so: John Smith, an expert on the global resource crisis and climate change, has made several statements on the current state of earth’s climate and resources.

6. Provide Your Evidence

After the introduction, provide your evidence, whatever it may be. Evidence can take many forms: statistics, a quote from an expert, a personal testimony, etc. You can also present evidence in several different ways, including in a quote, paraphrase, or summary. Here’s an example quote that I might use for my space exploration paper: In his book The Global Resource Crisis, Smith demonstrates why a backup plan is needed:
“With the current track we are on, the resources earth provides (such as food, water, clean air, etc.) will be completely depleted within 900 years” (40).

7. Analyze the Evidence

Whenever you use evidence in a paper, you cannot simply put it in and let it stand on its own. You have to analyze the evidence. A few things to do when analyzing evidence is to explain what the evidence is trying to say, why it is important, and how it relates to your discussion. The analysis for the evidence in my space exploration paper might look something like this: If what Smith claims is true, then in 900 years, humans will no longer be able to live on earth.

8. Tie the Evidence Back to Your Thesis

After you’ve presented your evidence and analyzed it, you need to state how the evidence supports your thesis for your paper. This step is crucial because without the tie-back your evidence serves no purpose. My tie-back in my exploration paper might look like this: Because of the possibility that earth will not be livable in the next few hundred years, investments should be made in finding other planets with the resources that humans need to continue living.

9. Repeat Steps 3-8 Until You’ve Completely Written the Body of Your Paper

Once you’ve compiled all of the components in steps 4-8, you can put them all together a refine them into a finished paragraph. You may need to add transitional phrases and things of that nature. Be sure to read over the paragraph multiple times to see if all of the components are fitting together smoothly.

You might be writing a basic five paragraph essay, in which case you may only need to use the Skeleton Method three times for your three body paragraphs. You might be writing a ten page paper, in which case, you might need to use the Skeleton Method so many times that you’ll memorize it and begin to use it intuitively. Whatever the case, the Skeleton Method is a useful tool that can assist you in writing an effective body for your paper.

From the Writing Center
at the Academic Resource Center
In Conclusion

Hopefully this study sheet has provided some useful information to guide you when you begin to write the body of your paper. Keep in mind that the Skeleton Method Outline only gives you the bare bones of what you need in a body paragraph. It is meant just to be a guide. You will likely have body paragraphs that do not follow this layout exactly, and that is completely fine. Once you get into putting all of your paragraphs together in your essay, you will also need to be thinking about transitional phrases/sentences. Check out the rest of the Writing Center’s resources on the beginning stages of writing a paper for more information on these other topics.