

Writing Body Paragraphs

Topic Sentence
Using Evidence Properly
Commentary

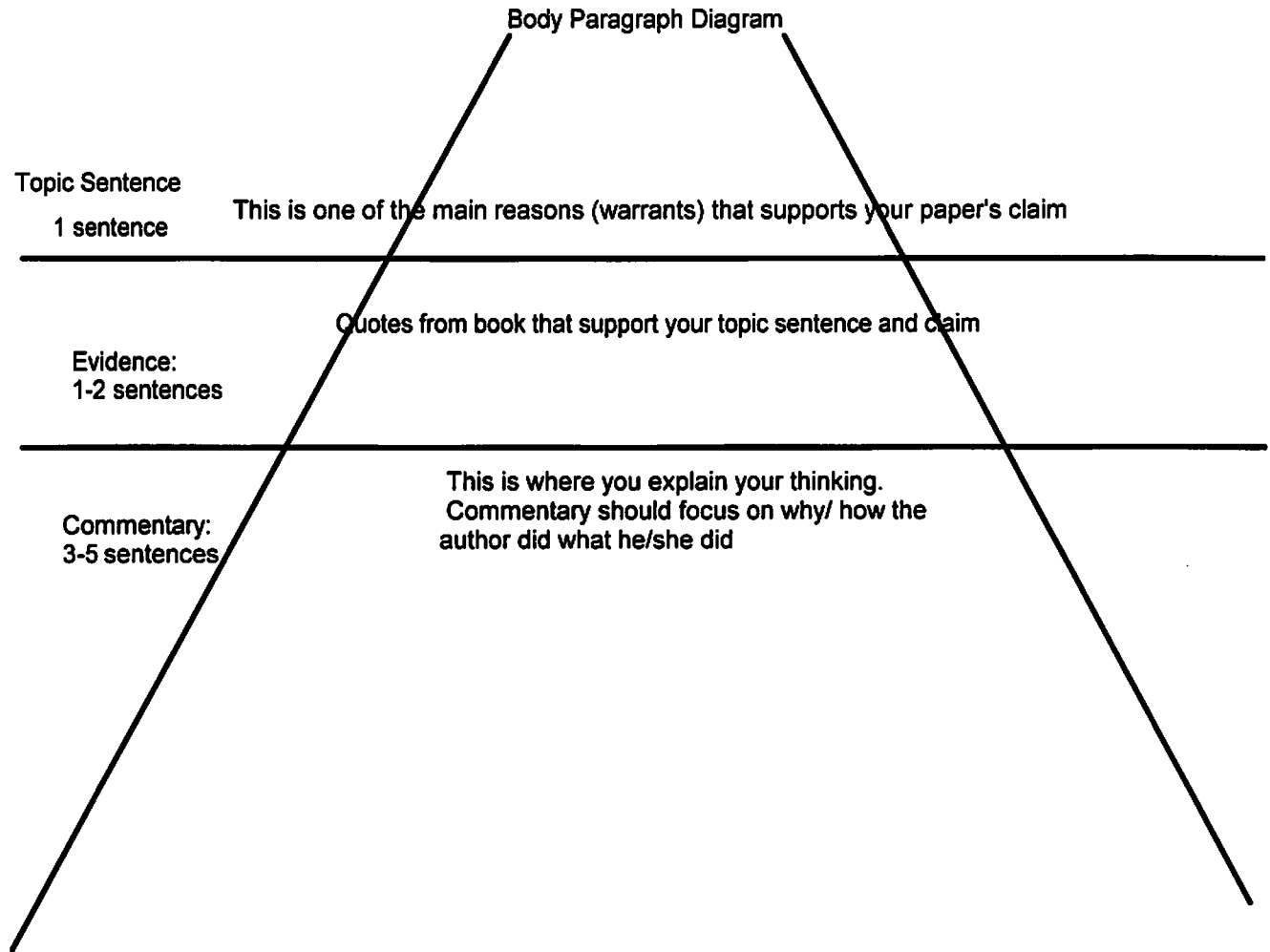
Some general rules...

- 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.

Critical essay body paragraphs



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?
- 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' 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.
- 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.

Critical essay body paragraphs

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.

- The claim introduces several interesting but undeveloped ideas
- In the book there is a connection between identity and happiness
- The main character faces great obstacles
- The first chapter sets the stage thematically for the rest of the book.
- These are the writer's opinion and they now need to be supported with evidence and explained by warrants.

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.

- Since the claim mentions individuals overcoming great obstacles first, the topic sentence of the next paragraph should begin with that.
- It might look something like the following:

Esperanza faces many challenges that Cisneros presents in the first chapter, but the greatest is accepting Mango Street as a part of her identity.

- 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 play.

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.

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.

- **Immediately after the topic sentence, you should provide evidence.**
- **This may take a couple of sentences but should not run away with the paragraph.**
- **The paragraph on the following slide show what might come next.**

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.

Critical essay body paragraphs

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.

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.