The university is a place of many different faculties and departments, and for each faculty or department there are different expectations for the focus, purpose, format, and structure of your paper. To ensure that you are adequately fulfilling those expectations, you will want to talk to your professor or T.A. However, as a general guideline, you can refer to this handout when organizing the content of your essay.

**The Introduction**

This paragraph’s primary purpose is to identify the essay’s main topic and argument. For that reason, you are on the right track if your introductory paragraph answers these two questions:

1) What is this paper about?
2) What argument does this paper make?

In most first- and second-year courses, your professor will want you to answer these questions separately, with the answer to the first question forming the topic sentence of the essay, and the answer to the second forming the paper’s thesis statement. However, in some cases, you can answer both of these questions in a single, concise sentence at the very beginning of the paper, leaving you room for other, secondary considerations, which could include:

- Providing background information on the topic
- Defining terms (avoid definitions taken directly from a dictionary)
- Establishing the context and significance of your inquiry
- Identifying the scope of your analysis (including brief reference to the evidence you present)
- Giving your reader some sense of the organization of your paper

**Note:** When writing your introduction, try to engage your reader, but do not be overly concerned with providing an initial “hook” to capture your reader’s interest. You best accomplish this by having an interesting and thought-provoking argument. Also avoid topic sentences that are too broad in scope. For example, no university essay should ever begin with a sentence like “Since the beginning of time…” or anything to that effect.

**Body Paragraphs**

The body paragraph’s main purpose is to present the evidence that supports your thesis. So this evidence, in whatever form it takes (quotation, paraphrase, statistic, equation, etc.), is the focal point of any body paragraph. All of the other components are there only to help aid you in presenting this evidence so that it is clear, contextualized, and connected to your thesis.

These ‘other components’ have no specific number, and can include further elaborating on a specific part of an issue or expanding your discussion of the implications of a particular problem, but in general, each body paragraph should contain a minimum of five essential components.
The Five Essential Components of Body Paragraphs:

1) **Topic Sentence** – One of the first sentences of each paragraph should tell your reader the specific idea, example, issue or subject that will be the focus of the rest of the paragraph. In some cases, you may write more than one sentence if you feel your reader needs additional background information.

2) **Context** – Transitioning directly from the topic sentence to, for example, a quotation can create some confusion for your readers because they will want to know where this new information comes from and why it has been included in your paper. For this reason, you will always want to establish context prior to introducing your evidence. This reference to context does not have to be a separate sentence, and in many cases can be as simple as “In her 2012 study, Dr. Smith argues that...”.

3) **Evidence** – Having contextualized the evidence, you can now present it in whatever form seems appropriate given your discipline. See our *Quoting and Paraphrasing* handout for more information.

4) **Explanation** – In most situations, your evidence will not be self-explanatory. This is especially true with quotations, which are highly interpretive, so you will want to explain to your readers how they should understand the significance of the evidence. This explanation can often be done in conjunction with the last component, Connection.

5) **Connection** – Having explained what the evidence means, and why that is important, you can now ‘wrap up’ this paragraph by showing your readers how this evidence supports your thesis statement. Be sure, at this stage, to avoid simply restating parts of your thesis. Instead, connect the specific discussion of this paragraph to that part of your argument to which it is most closely related.

**Note:** You can, of course, include more than one statement of evidence in a body paragraph (for example, two quotations), but remember that each piece of evidence needs both context and explanation, while the paragraph as a whole needs only one topic sentence. This gives you the following configuration:

- Topic Sentence
- Context
- Evidence
- Explanation
- Context
- Evidence
- Explanation
- Connection

### The Conclusion

This paragraph’s purpose is to summarize the paper’s major points of evidence and to remind the reader of the thesis statement. In addition, conclusions can offer recommendations or establish the significance of the topic from a broader, real-world perspective. For more information on conclusion paragraphs, see the handout entitled *Essays: Conclusions*. 