

Easy-to-Read Academic Papers and Essays

Concept 1: Papers have a recognizable hourglass shape academic readers are trained to expect.

In the US academic context, papers and essays usually have an hourglass shape: broad at the beginning, narrow in the middle, and broad again at the end as visualized in Figure 1 below. Academic readers often are trained to expect this organization style and may find a paper “confusing” or “off topic” without it.

The introduction and conclusion paragraphs are critical because they connect your local paper topic to a broader context. The **introduction paragraph** smoothly brings the reader into your paper by first introducing a broader context that your local paper topics fits into. **For example**, your local paper topic might be “*how to empower women to build wealth through starting their own businesses*” with a broader context of “*ways to eliminate poverty.*” Making this connection between the local paper topic and a broader context shows why your paper topic is important and relevant. The introduction paragraph ends with a thesis, which is developed in the body paragraphs.

The conclusion paragraph has two jobs. **First**, it wraps up your local paper topic by summarizing the main points in the body and giving the important takeaway point. **Second**, it ties your local important point into the broader context to show how it affects the bigger picture. The connection between the conclusion of the local paper topic and implication for the broader context must be explicit and transparent to the reader.

Introduction Paragraph Parts

- Context to hook audience’s attention [*See the example on the next page.*]
- Details to show why topic is relevant and important
- Thesis statement [*See “Concept 3” on page 3.*]

Body Paragraph(s) Parts

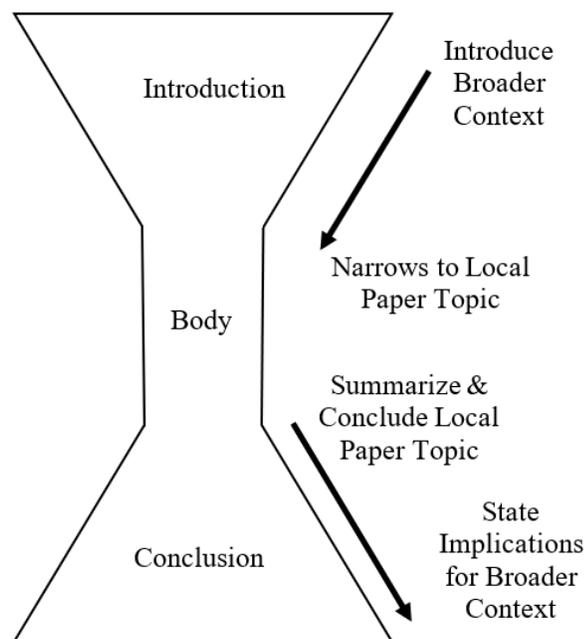
- One main idea (per paragraph)
- Explanation/expansion of idea
- Evidence and details

For more information, see our “[Easy-to-Read Coherent Paragraphs](#)” and “[Body Paragraphs](#)” handouts.

Conclusion Paragraph Parts

- Summary of the main points from the body
- Reminder of the thesis statement [*See the example on the next page.*]
- Clear and memorable closing observation or implication relating to the broader theme [*See the example on the next page.*]

Figure 1: Hourglass Paper Shape



Context and Hook

In the example below of a portion of an introduction paragraph, the **first part** of the sentence begins with a segment introducing the broad context to ease the reader into talking about research and Alzheimer's. The **second part** of the sentence ends with a segment suggesting a surprising hook that both intrigues the reader and allows them to predict that this paper's narrow topic will examine the costs and benefits of informing patients when there's no treatment.

(Broad Context) In recent years, researchers have made great strides in the early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, **(Hook)** but those diagnoses have raised a new problem about informing those most at risk who show no symptoms of it. ~Williams and Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 119.

Thesis Reminder and Closing Implication

In the example below of a portion of a conclusion paragraph, the **first sentence** summarizes for the reader the narrow paper topic that the text on dating profiles is an important feature. The **second sentence** relates the narrow paper topic (*text on profiles is important*) to the broader context of app design by showing the explicit implication that dating app designers suggest that they should move beyond 'swiping' culture.

(Thesis Reminder) The text of dating profiles carries critical information that can lead to more successful interactions. **(Closing Implication)** This textual aspect of dating profiles has implications that app designers should take into consideration as they think beyond the "swiping" culture.

Concept 2: Papers make a claim or an argument encapsulated in the thesis statement.

The introduction paragraph of any large unit of writing—an essay, report, or paper—**should end with a thesis statement** (*usually one or two sentences*), **which is the topic, your claim, and the major point to be discussed**. The claim is your argument, opinion, or stance that will be supported by the evidence and examples found. You present your evidence through your major points listed in the thesis statement.

Stress in the fast-food workplace has led to *serious* physical, psychological, and emotional *problems for employees*.

Topic: Workplace stress for fast-food workers

Claim: Stress causes problems.

Points: The paper will examine three areas—physical, psychological, and emotional—to support the claim.

The Japanese automobile industry has been *invigorated by foreign competition*, which has *forced it to create more* economical production techniques and creative, targeted branding for its cars.

Topic: The relationship between the Japanese car industry and foreign car industry

Claim: The foreign car industry caused innovation.

Points: The paper will examine two topics: first production techniques and then branding.

Concept 3: Papers benefit from transparent organization previewed in the thesis statement.

The thesis statement tells the reader the topic of the paper and the order of the major areas to be discussed. The writer previews the order of ideas and creates a sense of expectation in the reader. Academic readers are trained to expect this organization preview. If they cannot find the thesis, or if the writer does not use the order of ideas found in the thesis, then the reader will likely find the paper confusing and hard to understand. Each main point becomes at least one paragraph. Body paragraphs should only have one topic each.

The reader's expectation for this thesis is that the paper will examine production techniques and then branding to support the claim about foreign competition. First, the writer will talk about production techniques and second branding.

The Japanese automobile industry has been *invigorated* by **foreign competition**, which has *forced it to create more economical production techniques and creative, targeted branding for its cars.*

Short-Length Paper (2-3 Pages) Organization Example

Introduction: The Japanese auto industry being invigorated by foreign competition
Body Paragraph 1: Production technique trends in response to hybrid car production
Body Paragraph 2: Branding technique trends in response to electric car marketing
Conclusion: Summarize the historical Japanese responses and make predictions about a new area of auto development, e.g., self-driving cars, that will affect the Japanese auto industry.

Medium-Length Paper (3-6 Pages) Organization Example

Introduction: The Japanese auto industry being invigorated by foreign competition
Body Paragraph 1: Production technique trends in response to hybrid car production
Body Paragraph 2: Case study of Toyota's 2019 Prius vs. 2019 Kia Optima (*Korea*)
Body Paragraph 3: Branding of high-level trends
Body Paragraph 4: Case study of Honda's 2018 Clarity Electric vs. Tesla Model 3 (*USA*)
Conclusion: Implications for 2020 of the Japanese auto industry for hybrid and electric cars

Concept 4: Signal words tell the reader what the writer is doing.

Signal words help the reader understand the intention of the writer, so the reader will be able to transparently follow the writer's line of thought. Here are some **signal word types** and *examples*:

- **Addition:** *Also, in addition, furthermore*
- **Comparison:** *Equally, similarly*
- **Contrast:** *Instead, in contrast, conversely*
- **Example:** *For example, such as*
- **Qualifying:** *However, but, although, except*
- **Restating:** *In other words, put more simply*
- **Result:** *Because, so, therefore, as a result*
- **Sequence:** *First, second, next, after*

Concept 5: The paragraphs of a paper are all connected together into one whole unit.

Papers should be thought of as whole units, which argue for a single, unified position. As seen in Figure 2 below, papers should have a “writing arc” that introduces a topic, builds tension and curiosity for a topic, and then resolves the tension and satisfies the curiosity in the conclusion (Schimmel 96). A writing arc has a similar shape to a story arc. For an academic paper to be complete and compelling, readers need to have the payoff of the resolved tension and to have their curiosity satisfied.

Figure 2: Writing Arc



Figures 2-5 reproduced from Schimmel, 96-97.

In the US academic writing context, it is the job of the writer to be completely clear. Academic readers expect papers to be coherent, which means having the writer’s thought process laid out step-by-step, so they can easily see the reader’s reasoning, evidence, and argument. Papers have a hierarchical structure with smaller arcs nested in larger ones creating a single whole (Figure 3).

As seen in Figure 3, papers not only have an overarching writing arc, but each section and paragraph also has its own mini arc. Each mini arc draws the reader forward by engaging with the local opening, building tension, and resolving it. As seen in Figures 4 and 5, if the reader does not easily find those connections, then the writer will likely find the writing either confusing, unprofessional, or not credible. When writing lacks clear arcs, it becomes incoherent with no obvious direction, no internal structure, and no points of clear emphasis (Schimmel 97).

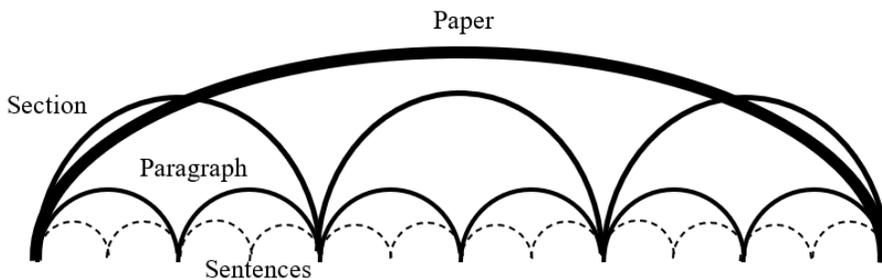


Figure 3: An easy-to-read paper with well-connected arcs

Figure 4: Shaky paragraph arcs and missing paper arc



Figure 5: Incomplete arcs



Strong coherence is created in papers through deliberately connecting every paragraph. First, the thesis statement tells the reader the topic of the paper and the order of the major areas to be discussed (“Concept 3”). Figure 6 below shows the outline of a four-paragraph paper about the Japanese auto industry that was discussed on page three. The outline shows how **the ideas lead into one another to create an overall well-connected and coherent argument** both locally in the paper and within the broader context.

First, notice how Figure 6 shows how each topic sentence points back to the thesis statement. Each body paragraph contains only one main point, which is ordered according to the thesis statement. **Second**, notice how Figure 6 shows how the conclusion transition sentence from each body paragraph leads into the following paragraph. Each paragraph arc draws the reader forward by engaging with the local opening, building tension, and resolving the tension.

Figure 6: Paper outline showing how paragraphs connect to one another

Paragraph	Sentence Job	Notes for Outlines
Introduction Paragraph	Hook / Context	Surprisingly, the Japanese auto industry was energized and not hurt by foreign competition.
	Thesis: Topic, Claim, and Points	Foreign competition forced creativity in economical production and branding.
Body Paragraph 1	Topic Sentence	Production technique trends made in response to hybrid car production.
	Conclusion Transition Sentence	Good product is not enough if no one buys, so building good brand recognition is also a crucial component.
Body Paragraph 2	Topic Sentence	Branding technique trends made in response to electric car marketing.
	Conclusion Transition Sentence	Japan’s two-fold approach of design and product branding has created not only strong sales at home but in many other countries as well by building brand reputation and loyalty.
Conclusion Paragraph	Narrow Paper Topic Summary	The Japanese auto industry has remained strong as it learns from and improves on what other countries do.
	Implications for Broader Context	The Japanese auto industry should get ahead of the curve by looking for the “next big thing” and getting ahead of it, e.g. self-driving cars.

Activity

Create a paper outline for a four-paragraph paper similar to Figure 6. Focus on connecting each “topic sentence” to the thesis and connecting each “conclusion transition sentence” to the next paragraph. Use your own topic or try this one: “Social media is a 21st century skill that should be taught in school.”

Introduction Paragraph	Hook / Context	
	Thesis: Topic, Claim, and Points	

Body Paragraph 1	Topic Sentence	
	Conclusion Transition Sentence	
Body Paragraph 2	Topic Sentence	
	Conclusion Transition Sentence	
Conclusion Paragraph	Narrow Paper Topic Summary	
	Implications for Broader Context	

References

Joseph Bizup and Joseph Williams. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 12th Edition*. Pearson, 2017.

Joshua Schimel. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, 2012.