

Structuring Essays

A good understanding of structure is key to writing an easily readable essay. Generally, essays have three main parts: (1) the **introduction**, (2) the **body**, and (3) the **conclusion**.

While some essays aim to inform or entertain, most essays in college are **argumentative**. In other words, they do not merely dump information but instead defend a specific position on a topic.

The **argument** of your essay is encompassed in the **thesis statement** (sometimes only called the **thesis** and usually located in the introduction). The **thesis statement** is the **argument**.

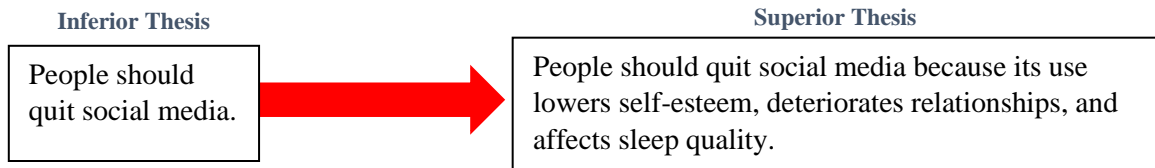
THESIS STATEMENT = ARGUMENT

For a thesis to be argumentative, it must be **debatable**. In other words, you **MUST** be able to agree or disagree with a thesis statement. Read the following example of a thesis statement:

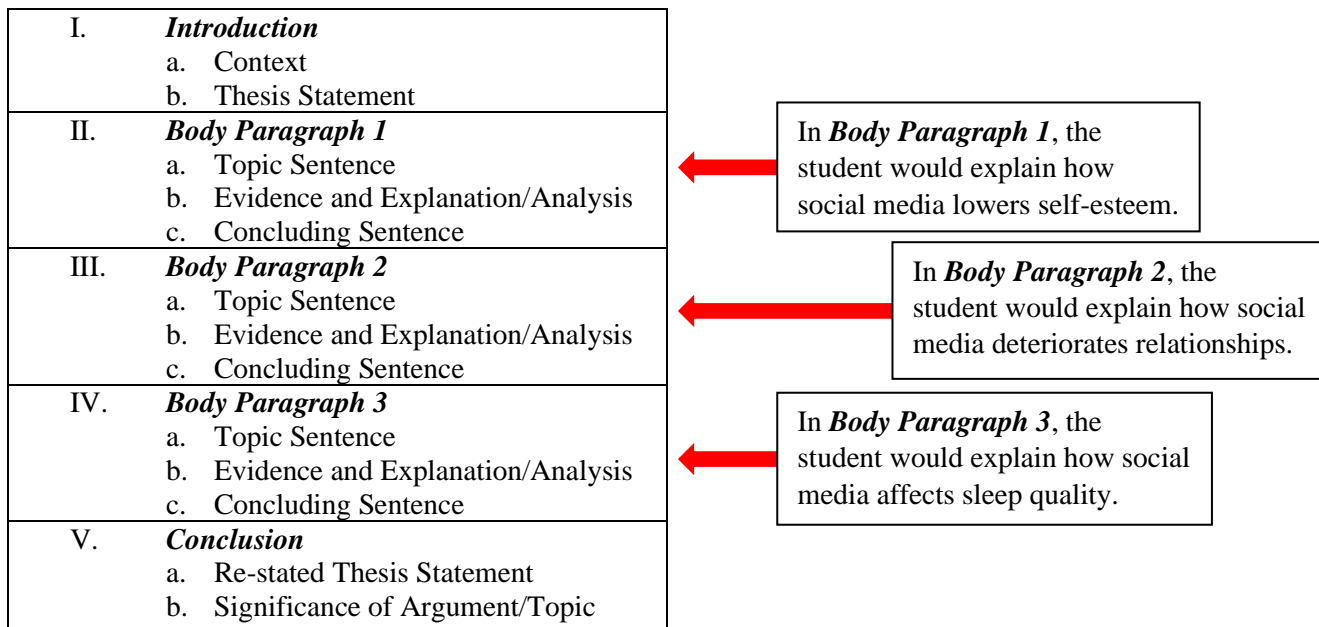
People should quit social media.

This thesis may be simple, but it is still a thesis. The word “should” is a dead giveaway of argumentation. After all, you *could* disagree with that statement, claiming instead that people should *not* quit social media.

Generally, thesis statements are better when they include the points of support (which are usually three):



Structuring an essay can be intimidating. However, you can use the following example of a standard essay structure for your written assignments:



More complicated ways to structure essays certainly exist, and the previous example will not always suffice for every essay. However, if you can master the shown example, then you can easily move up to more complicated structures.



Structuring Paragraphs

Generally, a paragraph has (1) a **topic sentence**, (2) **evidence and explanation/analysis**, and (3) a **concluding sentence**.

The Topic Sentence

First, the **topic sentence** sums up the content of the paragraph; it is an all-encompassing sentence that must summarize the supporting details in the paragraph’s body. All sentences in a paragraph’s body must *clearly* support the topic sentence.

The Evidence and Explanation/Analysis

Next, the **evidence and explanation/analysis** go in the paragraph’s body—*after* the topic sentence. The **evidence** will be information from outside sources, and it must directly and clearly support the topic sentence and the concluding sentence.

Then, together with the evidence, you must make your own contributions. To explain, your evidence must always be connected to your own **explanation/analysis** of how that evidence supports your argument. Please note that merely dumping quotes/evidence in a paragraph with no explanation/analysis is unacceptable.

The Concluding Sentence

Lastly, the **concluding sentence** repeats the topic sentence. In other words, the concluding sentence restates the idea in the topic sentence.

Paragraph Example

Read the following paragraph, paying attention to its structure. The topic sentence and the concluding sentence are underlined. Note that the body of the paragraph supports both the topic sentence and the concluding sentence. Note also that the evidence (quotes) are supported by the student’s explanation/analysis.

First, people should quit social media because it lowers self-esteem. The idea that social media is connected to lower self-esteem is no secret. In fact, scientists have remarked for years that social media is likely the cause behind the increased rates of low self-esteem in the 21st century. To begin, in the article “Social Media and Self-Doubt,” Rae Jacobson notes that the problem with social media is that people can “curate their lives... showing only the best and most enviable moments” (Jacobson). Undoubtedly, social media encourages people to hide the mundane and challenging aspects of their life. Then, when others see these seemingly “perfect” lives, they receive a distorted view of reality that makes them compare themselves and harms their self-esteem. In the article “Social Media’s Impact on Self-Esteem,” Clarissa Silva, a behavioral scientist with eighteen years of experience in mental health, discusses the negative effects social media has on people’s happiness. She states that she conducted interviews with active social media users and found that “60% of people using social media reported that it impacted their self-esteem in a negative way” (Silva). Clearly, the use of social media is connected to lower self-esteem. Furthermore, that 60% of social media users would admit social media affects them negatively proves social media has led to a widespread and pervasive societal problem that deeply affects people’s happiness and satisfaction. Hence, because social media lowers self-esteem, people should quit social media.

While different ways of structuring paragraphs certainly exist, if you become familiar with this standard way of structuring paragraphs, be assured that your professors will notice, and you will succeed in your writing assignments.