

Paper Organization

How should you organize a paper?

A basic organizational structure includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. However, there is no uniform organization that every piece of academic writing must follow. Different disciplines and different types of writing ultimately dictate how to organize a paper.

What is the role of an introduction?

An introduction sets up the paper providing essential background knowledge that guides readers through the rest of the paper. It usually ends with a thesis statement or research questions, which set up the main idea or purpose. For more information, see our [Introductions](#) and [Thesis Statements](#) handouts.

What is the role of the body paragraphs?

These paragraphs present evidence that supports and develops your thesis. The paragraphs appear in the same order as the topics are listed in the thesis. Typical body paragraphs follow a structure:

- **A topic sentence** relates back to your thesis and informs your readers about the focus of the paragraph.
- **Supporting sentences** develop the idea(s) introduced in your topic sentence by providing evidence, analysis, and evaluation of claims. Without effective support, the paragraph lacks purpose and leaves readers questioning the validity of your claims.
- **Sources** are not always required for a paper. However, including quotations, paraphrases, and/or summaries from credible authors can strengthen the paragraph. If you are using someone else's ideas or information, make sure to cite them properly.
- **Transitions** allow your readers to connect ideas. You can guide their attention between paragraphs or sentences, where needed, by using transitional words, phrases, or even whole sentences. Some examples of transition words are however, therefore, additionally, and since.

What is the role of the conclusion?

The conclusion is important because it reminds readers of the content of the paper while also providing them with ideas to consider. The information you decide to include will depend on your purpose for writing and your readers' expectations, but most conclusions restate the thesis, summarize the body paragraphs' main points, and establish the paper's significance (the "so what" for why people should care about your topic). For more information, see our [Conclusions](#) handout.