

STRUCTURE IN ESSAY WRITING

by David L. Hatton

The following outline and example demonstrate how to have balanced structure in your essay. The number of points may change, but the idea of introduction, balanced points, and conclusion, should be in all the essays and research papers that you write.

A THREE-POINT ESSAY

I. Introduction

- A. Opening sentence (an interest catcher)
- B. Body of paragraph (introduces why the essay is important or what the main points will be)
- C. Transitional sentence (helps lead into the body of the essay as a whole, or at least into the first point.)

II. Body of the Essay

- A. 1st Point (of equal importance or "weight" as 2nd or 3rd)
 - 1. Your first issue, fact or argument under 1st point (using as many sentences or paragraphs as necessary to state it clearly)
 - 2. Another issue, fact or argument under 1st point
 - 3. Etc., etc.
 - 4. Transitional sentence, either as last sentence of 1st point or beginning of 2nd point.
- B. 2nd Point (as above, etc.)
- C. 3rd Point (as above, etc.)

III. Conclusion

- A. Transitional sentence (leading into concluding remarks or restating briefly the main theme of your essay)
- B. Body of the paragraph (closing comments on each of the main points or brief, creative restatements of those points)
- C. Final sentence (a trailing sentence talking about a need for further study, how things might change, how others might study the same thing a bit differently, etc.)

SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF A THREE-POINT ESSAY:

Writing an essay is not a boring chore. When you realize that you are actually constructing a building with words, it can be fun. A good building needs a strong foundation, which is your introduction. The main points, or body, of the essay are like the rooms of the building, and house the whole purpose for writing it. Finally, a building needs a roof to cover it, which is your conclusion. Hopefully you are building according to a blueprint, the outline you make up before breaking ground.

The first part of your outline is the introduction. What are you going to write about? How are you going to introduce your subject in an interesting way to capture the reader's attention?

You must say something about the essay as a whole, perhaps telling what the main points will be, as I have done in the preceding paragraph. Or you might try telling why the central subject of the essay is important or who needs to know about it.

Be creative in how you present what you are about to write for your reader. But in the last sentence, try leading in to the first point. This brings a smooth transition of thought instead of a jagged jumping around.

So now you enter the main body of what you want to talk about. The key here is balance. Whether you have two, three, four or more points, they must each carry equal weight as far as importance. They also should show some relationship with each other under the central theme of the essay. Length of space given to each point is also important. You will not want one point to have six paragraphs of coverage and another only one paragraph. This is where you show your stuff as a writer. How well can you plan out your structure to make an orderly, well-balanced essay that flows smoothly without choppy thinking? This is why it is also helpful to have a transitional sentence between main points to help the reader's thinking flow from one point to another, right up to the conclusion.

How you conclude is vital, because it helps form in your reader's mind a final opinion of your work. Concluding remarks are the finale, almost like that of a symphony. In a symphonic finale the composer repeats short strains of the various main themes to remind the listener of what was played before. But you do not want to bore your reader with mere restatements of your main points or a synopsis of the essay. Leave the reader with a question or challenge to think further or to apply what you have shared. The best conclusion is one that lets readers know that they are at the end of your essay but at the beginning of something your essay shared with them to think about or do.

In conclusion then, what are you going to do about your essay writing? Are you going to throw things together on paper? Or will you draw up a blueprint, lay a firm foundation, build a magnificent superstructure and finish with a strong roof with no leaks? Get into good habits of planning for balance and for smoothness in the flow of ideas, and essay writing will not only be more fun, but you will feel the pride of creating a work of art in your own words.

The End
(or, the Beginning . . .)