

Anatomy of a Scholarly Paper

Center for Academic Success

School of Nursing - UMDNJ

In a college-level research paper, the writer brings many different sources together to discuss a particular topic. For your purposes, the point is to coherently relay what YOU have learned about that particular topic, based on your research. Unless instructed otherwise, your job is to demonstrate your newly acquired knowledge, NOT your personal opinion.

The paper should contain 3 main elements: an introduction, body, and conclusion. An APA-format paper will also contain a title page and a reference page. (See APA handouts for further information on the technical details of APA.)

Unless your instructor provides other directions, use these guidelines to gauge roughly how much of the paper (page length, word count, etc) should be devoted to each element:

Introduction.....5-15%
Body.....70-90%
Conclusion.....5-15%

A. Introduction

The intro contains a brief explanation of where the text is headed. It should get your reader's attention and explain the point of the discussion. It should also contain your paper's thesis, a statement that encapsulates what you're writing about and outlines the main point you intend to make.

Example thesis statement:

Smoking is a significant risk factor in many health conditions.

Although your intro can begin with a thesis statement, more intriguing ways to start your paper may include:

- posing a question or problem
- describing a dramatic incident
- citing unusual facts or statistics
- setting a scene

Although the introduction appears at the beginning of the paper, it isn't necessarily the first part to be written. The intro may

contain only 5-15% of the total word count, but it takes careful thought and time. If you're stuck on the intro, skip it and work on it again after you've written some of the rest of the paper.

In general, the intro should SAY WHAT THE PAPER IS GOING TO SAY.

B. Body

The body of the paper, which supports the thesis, makes up the bulk of the paper's length. The body makes your point by giving facts and examples, and cites supporting research. Each paragraph of the body should focus on one subtopic that proves or illustrates your original thesis, and should be backed up by facts, statistics, or examples cited from research.

Example body outline:

- ¶ Smoking is a widely known cause of cancer.
 - cite research about the correlation between smoking and lung cancer
 - cite research about the correlation between smoking and other cancers
 - cite research about the death rate from cancer in smokers vs. nonsmokers

- ¶ Second-hand smoke is also a significant health risk.
 - cite research about cancer rates in people exposed to second-hand smoke
 - cite research about asthma rates in kids exposed to second-hand smoke

- ¶ Smoking during pregnancy poses threats to the fetus.
 - cite research about the effect of smoking on birth weight
 - cite research about the effect of smoking on premature births

You may choose to start the body by writing background and historical information on the topic. The body is also where you

could present arguments against your thesis (counterpoint information supported by documented facts), and then defend your original statement.

In general, the body should make statements that back up your thesis, and then back those statements up with research. In other words, SAY IT.

C. Conclusion

Your paper should close as effectively as it opens. The conclusion should convey a sense of ending by re-stating your thesis and summarizing your main points. NO new facts, citations, or information should be included in the conclusion. However, a simple summary of main points is not always enough for a conclusion; a conclusion can leave the reader with something for further thought or consideration (food for thought.) Effective strategies to employ in a conclusion include:

- asking a pertinent question
- calling for action to support your point
- pondering the future of your topic
- suggestions for future research

In general, a conclusion should SAY WHAT YOU'VE SAID.