

Thesis

1. Your thesis statement, which is the primary focus of your paper, should be specific; it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence
2. A thesis statement can take the form of an argument, an analysis, or an explanation.
3. A thesis statement is usually one to three sentences long and is usually found somewhere between the middle and the end of your introduction.
4. Your thesis statement should give your reader a good idea of what they can expect to read in the rest of the paper.
5. Your topic may change as you write, so you may need to revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper.

Introduction

1. Use the introduction of your paper to join a dialogue. In other words, tell your reader where you're coming from and where you're going to. What have others said about this topic? How does your idea further or differ from others' ideas? How will your discussion fit into the overall dialogue? Your ideas fill a niche; describe the niche.
2. Maintain your specific focus. You never want to speak too generally about a topic. Rather, spend your time focused on a specific aspect of the topic. Use your introduction to focus from the larger topic down to your specific focus. For example, if you want to discuss cancer, you have to narrow your focus considerably. What type of cancer? What about that type of cancer? What have credible sources been saying about this specific topic? How do you want to add to their discussion?
3. Once you have set yourself up, so to speak, by broaching the topic and narrowing its focus, you should "turn" into your thesis. Read the following example:
 - a. "Roads and sprawling neighborhoods are replacing pristine wildlife habitats at an alarming pace, putting the survival and reproduction of plants and animals at risk. In just the last few decades, rapidly growing human settlements have consumed large amounts of land in our country, while wildlife habitats have shrunk, fragmented, or disappeared altogether. If the current land use pattern – expansion of built areas at rates much faster than population growth – continues, sprawl could become the problem for U.S. wildlife in the 21st century" (Terris, 1999).
4. Notice that Terris broaches the subject of land use and its consequences for wildlife; then, he "turns" into his thesis in the third sentence with the transitioning word, "if." The turn will usually take the form of such transitioning words as if, however, on the other hand, moreover, furthermore, etc. The transitioning word lets your reader know that you are moving into your thesis. It makes your thesis clear and recognizable.
5. Notice also that Terris defines a key term for his reader; in case the reader is unfamiliar with "the current land use pattern," Terris defines it right away. Always define your key terms, so your reader knows exactly what you mean by them.
6. ***Most importantly***, you must tell your reader why your idea is significant. Why should they bother to read the paper? Why should they be interested?

Body Paragraphs

1. Similar to your introduction, your body paragraphs should usually be organized in a manner that moves from general to specific information.
2. Every time you begin a new subject, as the paragraph progresses, you should become more and more focused on the argument ending with specific, detailed evidence supporting a claim.
3. Lastly, you must explain how and why the information you have just provided connects to and supports your thesis (a brief wrap up or warrant).
4. Try not to be too formulaic; add some diversity to your paragraphs. There is no need to follow this model to a tee for each and every paragraph; such formulaic writing lacks luster and is repetitive to read.
5. Consider the best way to organize your body paragraphs. Which subtopic should come first, second, etc.? Your organization of the body of your essay needs to be consciously chosen, and the reasoning should be fairly clear to your reader.
6. When you consciously organize the body of your essay, your transitioning will come naturally. The end discussion of one subtopic will naturally begin the discussion of your next subtopic. One idea tagging the other, if you will.
7. Directional words are always helpful. Transition through body paragraphs, and from one paragraph to another, using words and phrases that help move the reader along: next, thus, in addition to, etc.
8. It is not advisable, however, to use first, second, third, finally, etc. These transitions lack luster and are repetitive to read.
9. Don't believe any rule you hear about a properly sized paragraph. Paragraphs will vary in length like people vary in height: most are of average size, but many will be above average, and many will be below average. It depends on what you want to say and how much room you need to say it.
10. Whatever the length of your paragraph, you absolutely must offer full explanations of your ideas. Just as your key terms need defining, your ideas need explaining. Don't leave your reader hanging; explain yourself at every stage of your essay.

Conclusion

1. After moving from general to specific information in the introduction and body paragraphs, your conclusion should begin pulling back into more general information that reminds your reader of the main points of your argument.
2. Do not repeat your thesis verbatim from your introduction.
3. Don't try to bring in new points or end with a whopper conclusion or try to reinvent the wheel in the final sentence of your conclusion. When you're done, you're done. Simplicity is the best strategy for a clear, convincing message.