

Research Paper Structure: A Loose Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Catches the reader's attention
- B. Indicates topic and narrows it
- C. Leads towards the body- sets the stage
- D. Has a strong, very specific thesis statement
 - 1. Limits what you will write about
 - a) Identifies your topic and the specifics you will address
 - 2. Gives a focus as to what you will explore about topic
 - a) Defines the specific points for analysis
 - b) Minimizes the range of ideas that you will explore in the essay
 - c) Sets the boundaries, of which you will not stray
 - d) Puts forth an argument that you will defend

II. Background

- A. Historical context (not always necessary, depending on your topic!)
 - 1. Does not provide an entire history of your topic
 - 2. Limits historical focus to relevant period and events
 - 3. Helps reader put essay in time context
 - 4. Helps reader make important links to influential events
- B. Basic information for understanding context of thesis

1. Provides information about topic (general and specific) for those unfamiliar
2. Defines specific terms/ideas associated with your topic

III. Analysis/Argument- Core of the essay (The following points A-C apply to *each body paragraph and point of analysis*)

A. Breaks down the thesis into sub-points (separate paragraph for each point in analysis)

1. Establishes broad points
2. Identifies each point and defines it
3. Narrows each point with specific details
4. Shows comparisons or contrasts to be analyzed

B. Gives reasons for points or arguments that you make

1. Supports points with explanation
 - a) Fully develops the idea
 - b) Uses facts to support point
2. Use logical reasoning
 - a) Connects ideas in a manner that does not confuse the reader
 - b) Makes assumptions or opinions that can be backed with evidence

C. Shows evidence of your points

1. Uses relevant examples (primary sources)
2. Applies criticism and outside sources (secondary sources)
 - a) Quotes sources accurately

(1) Introduces quotes with the author and source of the information

(2) Provides only that much of the quote that is necessary to get across meaning

(3) Explains the significance of the quote in relation to the point you were making

(4) Uses correct parenthetical reference

3. Summarizes and paraphrases succinctly

4. Avoids any plagiarism and documents all sources

IV. Conclusion

A. Sums up the essay

1. Possibly reworks the thesis

2. Restates the points in a different way

3. Focuses the significance of the essay

B. Provides a Sherlock-Holmes-style conclusion

1. What does all the evidence lead to?

2. What does the future hold?

3. What is the next logical step or idea?

V. Works Cited

A. Follows proper MLA formatting

1. Lists all sources referenced in the essay

2. Compiled on a separate page from the rest of the research paper

* Developed by Vincent Crampton, amended by Prof. Kaiser for use in WR2