

# The Five-paragraph Essay

The standard format for writing in most introductory college classes is the five-paragraph essay. The basic format is fairly straightforward and allows the writer to stay organized and to keep a clear sense of direction.

The basic outline of a five paragraph essay is as follows:

## I. Introduction:

Start with a general idea and work your way to a specific idea, as seen in the keyhole approach. Your general idea will bring the reader into the subject slowly without giving too much away all at once. To simplify, an introduction would look something like this:

***Making any kind of large purchase can be quite overwhelming. Buying a car is no different. While it can be quite exciting, it can also be a little daunting. There are many important decisions to be made, such as which model to choose and what body style is preferable. While not all buyers value the same things, in general there a few key factors to consider. When buying a car, it is most important to consider the cost (A), the reliability (B), and the features (C).***

As you can see, the intro begins with a general idea, and the focus of each of the following sentences gets narrower until I

reach the thesis, the most specific thought in the paragraph. In general, the sentences lay out like this:

1. General idea
2. Explain, qualify, or clarify the general idea
3. Bridge between the general and the more specific idea you will be developing
4. Set up the thesis
5. Thesis statement that lays out the A, B, and C of what you will discuss in the essay

Once you have completed the introduction and laid the groundwork for the rest of the essay, you are all set to write. Be sure to develop the essay in the same order in which you have said that you would in the thesis.

## II. Body

The body of the essay is where you develop each of the ideas that you have laid out in your thesis.

Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that picks up the idea (A, B, or C) and relates it to the thesis statement. Transition words should be used to signal that you are changing ideas either within a paragraph or between paragraphs.

So, to take our example above, the body of the essay would look something like this:

*To begin with, the fees associated with purchasing a car are a significant consideration. Special attention must be paid to the finances. For example, that gigantic gas-guzzling SUV may look great at first glance, but being able to afford to put gas in it twice a week may become a bit of a financial burden. Additionally, while the hot little import seems to be calling out to be purchased, the cost of oil changes and general maintenance may put it out of reach. Moreover, the insurance on such a vehicle will certainly become too much to manage on a budget. Finally, the high-mileage bargain that seems so appealing on the lot will likely cost a small fortune to sustain in the long run. Overall, the economic impact of buying a car need to be well thought out before a purchase is made.*

*Furthermore, dependability is a serious consideration in the choice of car to buy. No one wants to buy a vehicle that is not consistent. Most people rely on their vehicles to get them to work, school, or other obligations, so to have a car that may not start on a cold winter morning is not ideal. Moreover, a vehicle that will break down on the side of the road will not be the best choice for someone who needs regular transportation to and from work. Similarly, having a vehicle that constantly needs to be serviced because of mechanical issues is not ideal. The time spent on attending to an unreliable vehicle is time wasted.*

*Lastly, the vehicle's options should always be taken into the decision to purchase. A vehicle without the necessary features is worthless. For example, the car with the*

*heated seats will always win out over the one without them. Of course, the sunroof will always be a welcome addition for rides along the beach. And who can deny the desirability of having a fantastic sound system. After all, music is meant to be felt and heard. Naturally, the softer and more luxurious the seats, the better. And finally, the color of the exterior has to be just right to send the appropriate message to people on the street. Enjoying the amenities that the car has to offer is part of enjoying car ownership.*

Once all three ideas have been discussed in the order in which they were presented, the body of the essay is done.

### III. Conclusion

The purpose of the conclusion is to reiterate (NOT REPEAT!!) the ideas from the body of the essay. It is not the place for new information or to introduce material that has not been discussed before. It begins with a statement that reminds the readers of what has been discussed and broadens from there. Finishing our example from above, the conclusion might look something like this:

*Clearly, purchasing a vehicle is a major decision that requires careful thought. Focusing on key factors like budget, dependability, and options will make the process smoother. Taking the time to shop around and learn what is available and what is really important to the individual buyer will make the experience more enjoyable and less stressful.*