

How to Write an Essay

A good essay has three basic parts: an **introduction**, a **body** and a **conclusion**. To most kids, those terms are familiar, but that does not mean they are easy to understand what they are and how they work. In my class (and in other classrooms), I use a **hamburger** analogy to help kids understand how an essay is “structured” or put together. All hamburgers have a **top bun** (the introduction), a **patty/meat** (the body) and a **bottom bun** (the conclusion). What you put on your burger – lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle, mustard, mayo, etc. – make the burger bigger, fuller and tastier. Just as we add items to a burger to make it better, we can also add details, examples, statistics, etc. to the body of an essay to make it more interesting. Let’s take a glance at each part of a good essay.

The Introduction

The introduction is the most important paragraph (or two) in an essay because – if written properly – it is a “miniature version” of your essay (I’ll explain that later). A good introduction also contains three basic parts: a **hook**, a **thesis** and your **points, ideas or arguments**. Let’s look at each of these three items in more detail.

The **hook** helps get your reader interested in your essay. A hook can be written by using one of the following techniques: a rhetorical question, a sound effect, a quote (from a famous person), an interesting or startling fact and/or a declarative statement.

Example:

In the past 20 years the world’s population has nearly doubled. By the end of this year, there will be over 7 billion people living on the planet Earth.

The **thesis** is a statement that tells your reader what your essay is going to be about. If you are writing in response to a prompt or exam question, the thesis can be written directly (or slightly re-worded) from prompt or question.

Example:

Question: Write an essay in which you explain why we need to colonize other planets.

Thesis: The planet is overcrowded; therefore, it is vital that we colonize other planets.

The last part of your introduction is a statement of your reasons, points, ideas or arguments. There is no “magic number” as to how many of these you need to have in an essay. Many teachers like for students to have a minimum of three (that’s how you get a “five-paragraph essay”). Sometimes, though, two GREAT reasons or points can make a GREAT essay. Other times, it takes four or five reasons or arguments to make your point known or to successfully argue your point. Let’s use the same topic – colonizing other planets – to round out our introduction.

Example/Reasons: 1. The Earth is too crowded. 2. There won't be enough resources for people to survive on earth. 3. Space travel leads to inventions and discoveries that help people on Earth too.

Sample introduction:

In the past 20 years the world's population has nearly doubled. By the end of this year, there will be over 7 billion people living on the planet Earth. It is vital that we colonize other planets because the Earth is too crowded, there won't be enough resources for people to survive on earth, and space travel leads to inventions and discoveries that help people on Earth too.

Now, with a little more "Umph" or a little drama I like to call "voice".

In the past 20 years the world's population has nearly doubled. By the end of this year, there will be over 7 billion people living on the planet Earth. That's SEVEN BILLION! There are over 1 billion people in China and India alone, and the population in nations all over the world is growing at alarming rates. If we don't do something soon, the Earth will not survive. It is important – no, it is vital to the survival of the human race – that we colonize other planets. We must explore the option of colonizing other planets because the Earth is too crowded. Beyond the need for space, there won't be enough resources – food, water, and shelter – for people to survive. Even more important, space travel leads to inventions and discoveries that help people on Earth now and in the future.

The Body

As I stated before, a good introduction is a miniature version of your essay. It contains your thesis – or what you are going to write about – and it contains the three (or four, or two) reasons, ideas or arguments. Those ideas or arguments become the body of your essay. If you have three reasons or ideas or arguments, the body of your essay will have three – different – separate paragraphs. Each paragraph will have one and only one idea in it, but that idea will have examples, data, facts, or opinions to support it or to add mustard, onions and ketchup to your burger. Let's continue with the essay example above.

Second paragraph:

It is hard to image what a number like 7 billion looks like in real life. Most people have never seen 1 million of anything in their life. A billion is a thousand million. Countries like China and India are already way over crowded. While these countries have already implemented laws to control their population, it is not just how many people born each year that is the issue. People are living longer which also impacts the Earth's population. In 1900, the average man lived

to be 62 years old. By 1990, the average life expectancy grew to 72 years old. Today, in 2011, that age has risen to almost 80 years old. Even though families are having fewer children, people are living longer and longer, which affects the Earth's population.

The third paragraph (which is the second body paragraph) would be about the Earth's resources and our inability to feed, clothe and house a growing population. The fourth paragraph (which is the third paragraph in the body) would be about how space exploration and colonization would bring necessary inventions, jobs and resources back to Earth.

Notice that I started the second paragraph with a hook similar to the one I used to start the essay. When you first start to write essays, it is OK to use transition phrases such as, ***The first reason why we need to colonize other planets is...*** As you get more practice and become a better writer you won't need to use these phrases.

The Conclusion

Finally, we've come to the end of our essay or the ***conclusion***. It is typical for kids to "give up" and not write a conclusion because many feel they don't know how. Fear not because you've already written it. That's right. Just as a hamburger has two buns – a top and a bottom – an essay has a beginning (an introduction) and an end (conclusion) and just as a hamburger bun is basically the same on the top and bottom, a conclusion is basically your introduction but just slightly re-worded. It, too, has a hook, thesis and reasons. They are just presented in less detail. Take a look.

Example:

What do you think our world will be like if our population continues to explode the way it has over the past 20 years? As it stands now, our world is overcrowded. We need colonize other planets because the Earth is too crowded, there won't be enough resources for people to survive on earth, and space travel leads to inventions and discoveries that help people on Earth too.