

yes-or-no question; and fifth, by qualifying your answer to this question.

That qualified answer is your thesis. You know now precisely what it is you want to say—and that is the first long step in the path toward better writing.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between opinion and thesis?
2. What is the five-step process for narrowing a general subject to a thesis?
3. What is the value of the yes-or-no question?
4. Why is qualification of a thesis important?

ASSIGNMENT

At the top of a sheet of paper, write the name of some subject in which you are now enrolled. Then do the following:

1. Write at least five statements of fact about it.
2. Write at least two yes-or-no questions that occur to you in relation to these facts.
3. Write a thesis based on one of the questions.
4. Write an antithesis. (If your antithesis is not valid, write a new thesis. Keep trying until you are sure that both thesis and antithesis can be defended.)
5. Give at least one reason (or one piece of evidence) supporting your antithesis.
6. Give at least two reasons (or pieces of evidence) supporting your thesis.
7. Write a paragraph based on your thesis (#3). Include in this paragraph the point supporting the antithesis (#5) and both the points supporting your thesis (#6). Bear in mind that your purpose is to persuade a reader to agree with your thesis. Organize your paragraph in the way that seems to be best for this purpose.

VOCABULARY

1. Find a synonym to use in place of each of the italicized words in the sentences below. Rewrite the sentences if necessary.

- a. Everything he had to say on the subject was the *antithesis* of all I believed.
- b. He is so *arbitrary* in his judgments that it is impossible to reason with him.
- c. Nobody believes that point is *arguable*.
- d. He was a small, meek-looking man, but he was a *formidable* opponent in a debate.
- e. His *impassioned* plea fell on deaf ears.
- f. He was an *indulgent* grandfather.
- g. Nobody ever had a more *unpromising* start in business.

2. The words "principle" and "principal" are often confused because they sound alike although they are spelled differently and have different meanings. Sometimes the only way to master such words is to invent some private trick—a rhyme, a joke, any kind of nonsense that will help you remember their difference. It doesn't matter how silly it seems, if it works. One student, for example, wrote "I can remember that 'principle' means 'rule' because it ends like 'disciple' which reminds me of the Golden Rule." It worked for him. What works for you? Write two or three sentences explaining how you keep these words and their spelling (and meaning) clear in your own mind. If you don't already have a trick of your own, make one up.
3. Write a sentence or two defining "status symbol" and giving a specific example of some kind of status symbol that a student might use. (Don't use an automobile as your example. Make it a status symbol that the student could wear or carry with him.)

3

The Full and Final Thesis

In learning how to arrive at a thesis you have already taken the first major step in improving your skill in writing essays. The next step is the preparation of a full thesis statement. This step may seem purely mechanical, and in a sense it is mechanical. You could learn to do it without ever knowing the processes it represents, just as you can turn an ignition key and start a motor without any understanding of the internal-com-

bustion engine. Actually, your thesis is a kind of ignition key to your essay; until you turn it your writing will generate no power.

But beyond this point the analogy breaks down. Ideas and engines are very different things. You can drive a thousand miles without understanding the principles of internal combustion, but you will not take a very long or very interesting trip in an essay unless you understand not only how to prepare a full thesis but why you do it. That *why* is very important.

First, however, you need to know exactly what is meant by full thesis.

Elements of a Full Thesis

So far, your thesis is simply your opinion sharpened to one pointed statement. Your *full thesis* will have three elements:

1. *Thesis*
2. *Points that can be made against your thesis*
3. *Points in favor of your thesis*

Putting these three elements together in a full thesis statement requires no particular writing skill; at this point you are not concerned with stylistic flourishes. You are merely arranging, in an orderly way, the raw materials you will be working with when you write. The full thesis statement never appears in its original form in the finished essay. But its importance can hardly be overestimated. For the full thesis is your only sure guide through the tangle of ideas that always surround an essay topic as soon as you begin to write in earnest.

The Psychology of Argument

The three elements of a full thesis represent the psychology of all argument, whether written or oral. The goal in any argument is identical to the goal in any essay—to win others to a particular point of view, to *persuade*. And the same three elements are always present in a successful argument, no matter whether it is a written essay, a formal debate, or even a family quarrel.

Suppose yourself in the midst of a typical family crisis. You want to borrow your father's car to take your girl to a dance. The last time you drove the car, however, you dented a fender

—a circumstance that causes your father to view any further driving on your part with something less than sympathy. How do you persuade him to let you use the car again?

If you are a man of few words and very little wisdom, you stride up to him, announce without preamble that you want the car, and wait to see what happens. Your father, if he is typical, will probably ask you if you have lost your mind. He may even shout a little, and wave his arms, and turn slightly purple.

Result: you don't get the car.

If you are a man of much emotion and little reason, you may use pressure tactics: "Gee whiz, Dad, I'm not ten years old, after all. Other guys my age drive all the time. I dent one crummy fender and you act like I committed a crime. Good grief, you ought to know I didn't do it on purpose. Anyway, it seems to me like you'd want to do something nice for me once in a while . . ." And so forth.

Sounds pretty adolescent, doesn't it? As certainly it is. Sincere, yes. Reasonable, no. It is simply a great incoherent jumble of injured emotionalism, and it will convince no parent that you are a mature and responsible person.

Result: you don't get the car.

So, if you are wise, you use a third approach. First of all, you modify that belligerent "I want the car!" It becomes a request rather than a demand: "I hope you'll consider letting me use the car tonight, Dad." Thus you recognize, by a process very similar to the process of qualifying a thesis, that the matter must be settled not merely on the basis of your private desires but on the basis of your father's authority. And your father, if he is a reasonable man, will be willing to hear you out. You are not groveling, but you are showing respect for his rights. And he appreciates it.

Then you admit that your father has good reason to mistrust your driving skill: "Dad, I know I was to blame for denting that fender last week . . ." Your father is agreeably impressed by the good sense of this remark. He is willing to go on listening. Nothing softens the opposition so much as a graceful admission that it has some points in its favor.

And so you wind up your case with the arguments most likely to work in your favor: "I made the date before I damaged the fender. Incidentally, I've already made arrangements to have it repaired and to pay for it myself. And I'd like another chance to prove to you that you can trust me to drive."

Result: you *may* get the car.

Your father, if he is a reasonable man, will at least be willing to consider your request fairly. And that is all, really, that you have the right to expect. But you have earned that right because you have presented your case as one reasonable man to another. You have not made a belligerent, unexplained demand ("I want the car!"), nor have you poured out an incoherent jumble of emotionalism ("I'm not ten years old . . . other guys . . . crummy fender . . . etc."). You have used, whether you know it or not, the psychology of argument. And it has a very definite pattern—a pattern identical to the one you will use in preparing a full thesis statement:

1. Thesis (accurate, qualified statement of main idea): "I hope you'll consider . . ."
2. Point that can be made against thesis: "I know I was to blame . . ."
3. Points in favor of thesis: "I made the date before . . .", "I'll pay for the damage . . .", "I'd like another chance to prove you can trust me . . ."

Strongest Argument Last

Observe that even in the arrangement of your reasons you follow a pattern. The reasons are presented in an ascending scale, with the strongest (from your father's point of view) coming last. The fact that you made the date before you damaged the fender is relatively unimportant to him; the fact that you have taken responsibility for the damage is much more important—he begins to feel some respect for you at this point; but most important of all to him is your desire to prove your trustworthiness, for it appeals both to his sense of fair play and to his instincts as a father. You need only to reverse the order of your reasons to see how your case would be weakened in your father's eyes.

Every successful argument, written or oral, conforms to the pattern: statement of case, recognition of opposition, and defense, with the strongest argument placed last. All this may make an essay seem no different from a debate or a trial by law. As a matter of fact, the underlying logic is identical. The difference is simply in emphasis, in language, and in style of execution. An essay may seem light as thistledown, intimate as a friendly conversation, but always at its core is the same inescapable iron logic of argument. The pattern may be beautifully disguised, but it will be there.

Form of the Full Thesis

Type or write your full thesis on a card or separate sheet of paper. Put it on the wall in front of your desk if possible; you should keep it in full view all the time you are working on your essay. The form is very simple. State your thesis and arrange your *pro* and *con* arguments below it. Your thesis on drag racing, for example, would look like this:

<p>Thesis A: Today's drag-racing teen-ager is primarily an automotive engineer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Con</i></p> <p>Dangers of drag racing Drivers irresponsible, merely attracted by danger Destructiveness (tire burning, etc.) Noisy, dirty</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pro</i></p> <p>Drivers become expert mechanics Pride in workmanship Respect for rules at dragstrips Most criticism uninformed Safety important</p>
<p>Thesis B: Today's drag-racing teen-ager is usually an irresponsible show-off.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Con</i></p> <p>Drivers are good mechanics Pride in workmanship Respect for dragstrip rules</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pro</i></p> <p>Wasteful, dirty, noisy Reckless love of danger Emphasis on mechanical skill rather than on responsibility Racing instinct encouraged</p>

Here, in a nutshell, is the substance of your entire essay for either thesis. The *con* arguments are placed on the left simply for convenience—you take care of these first. Then you can move on, developing fully the *pro* arguments that support your thesis.

Once you have this full thesis statement before you, a glance at it will tell you exactly what points you are going to make. Under *con* will be the points that can be made against your thesis; these you must be prepared to concede ("It is true that some young people are attracted to drag racing merely because of a reckless love of danger, but . . .") or to counter with reasonable argument ("Although most adults are quick to accuse drag racers of irresponsibility, few of them have any real knowledge of what goes on at a dragstrip . . ."). Think of your *con* list as the points you will *concede* and of

your *pro* list as the points you will *propound*, and you will be on safe ground. Your *pro* list will always be the longer one, of course, for this is the main body of your argument.

Your paragraphs will not necessarily follow the exact order of the points listed in your full thesis. The points are there to *guide* you, remember, not to dictate to you. As you write you may find that their position in the essay needs to be shifted. A point that seemed minor may suddenly assume a new importance; one that at first seemed major may dwindle to relative insignificance. But all your carefully-thought-out ideas are there, ready for you to develop.

What if your thoughts suddenly branch out, expand, bring new ideas that seem important? By all means take advantage of their possibilities. Never let a good idea get away from you just because you didn't think of it before you wrote your full thesis statement. But always check out each new idea. Ask yourself: "Is it related to my main point? Does it make my point clearer or merely confuse it? Am I putting it where it belongs, or would it be more effective in another paragraph?" If a new idea works, if it will help persuade your reader, then by all means use it. No writer boxes himself in so rigidly with a full thesis statement that he can't wander afield to make a related point.

The full statement will, however, prevent you from wandering completely off course. If you continually check your developing essay against it, you won't find yourself discussing dragging one minute and your pal Bill the next. You won't begin a paragraph on prom queens, bog down in a swamp of sentiment about misunderstood youth, and emerge ten sentences later with an observation on your Aunt Martha's chocolate pie. You will move freely around any point you wish to make, but you won't fly off in another direction altogether. Your full thesis is your check against the temptations of irrelevancy.

The temptations are strong. If your ideas come thick and fast when you write, you are tempted to grab them all and stuff them into your essay willy-nilly for fear of missing one good point. If your ideas come slowly and painfully, you are tempted to use anything that occurs to you in the hope that it will somehow miraculously fit. The full thesis guards you against either of these extremes. It disciplines the writer who has too many ideas, forcing him to organize his scattered thoughts and to check each one for relevance. It stimulates the writer who has too few ideas, reminding him of the exact points that he must bring out.

Summary

The full and final thesis is the thesis plus a list of the points that can be made against it and a longer list of the points in its favor. These *con* and *pro* points, listed separately for easy reference under the thesis, provide an organization chart for your entire essay. You should keep your full thesis statement on a separate card that is in full view all the time that you are writing. Use it, not as a rigid outline, but as a guide and a reminder. It will check your tendency to wander off course and will keep you constantly aware of the points you need to make.

The full thesis is a most remarkable and valuable device. Prepare it carefully, refer to it often, use it wisely. It will serve you well as you go more deeply into the structure of essays.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three elements of a full thesis?
2. Explain the relationship of the full thesis to the psychology of argument.
3. Why should the full thesis statement be kept in view when you are writing an essay?
4. How strictly should you follow the full thesis when you write your essay?

ASSIGNMENT

1. Below are several thesis statements. Write a full thesis statement for each, using the form on page 37.
 - a. The search for popularity generally leads to self-improvement.
 - b. The search for popularity can limit a student's personal growth.
 - c. All girls are slightly crazy.
 - d. All boys are slightly crazy.
 - e. Competition for grades is a healthy influence on students.
 - f. Competition for grades is an unhealthy influence on students.

2. Using your full thesis statement as a guide, write an essay of at least five paragraphs on one of the topics above. You must work into your essay *all* the material suggested by your full thesis. Develop and arrange your paragraphs in any way that seems effective, bearing in mind that your purpose is to persuade the reader to agree with your thesis.
- NOTE: Hold on to this assignment. You will use it again, later.

VOCABULARY

1. Find a synonym for each of the following words:

adolescent	flou. ish (n.)	modify
analogy	groveling	preamble
belligerent	incoherent	propound
concede	irrelevancy	relevance

2. Use each of the synonyms you have found for the listed words in a complete sentence. Each sentence must relate in some way to the problems of essay writing. Be as informal as you please—complain if you feel like it. But use the synonym, and be sure that your sentence bears some relation to essay writing. For example, you might write something like this, using "youthful" (the synonym for one of the words above):

It is a cruel and inhuman thing to curb my youthful spirit by forcing me to use logic in order to find a thesis.

4

Structure

The basic structure of the essay is extremely simple. It has three parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion—or, to put it in even simpler terms, a beginning, a middle, and an end. If this strikes you as painfully obvious, you may be surprised to learn that failure to understand this simple arrangement probably explains the collapse of more essays than any other single cause.

The tendency of the beginning writer is to jump squarely into the middle of an essay, unloading information and opinion however it comes to mind. (Instead of introducing his subject, he throws it at his reader (and usually misses). Instead of concluding it, he drops the whole thing with a thud or spins it out intolerably because he doesn't know how to stop. All his careful preparation seems to have been for nothing. And the student is unhappily aware of this; he knows that somehow his essay didn't quite come off. He is as disconsolate and uncomprehending as the mad egg-lady who gathers her eggs with exquisite care, packs them delicately into a basket, and then weeps because they break when she dumps them on the floor.

Fortunately, the writer is not in quite so hopeless a position as the egg-lady; if he scrambles his basket of ideas the first time he tries to unload them in writing, he can re-assemble his collection later and begin again. But he can save a great deal of time and wasted effort if he knows in advance what he wants to do with his ideas, if he realizes that when he writes an essay he is confronted not with a dumping process but with a building process.

So think of yourself as a builder. And think of your essay as a *structure*. This basic structure is very simply illustrated in Figure 1.

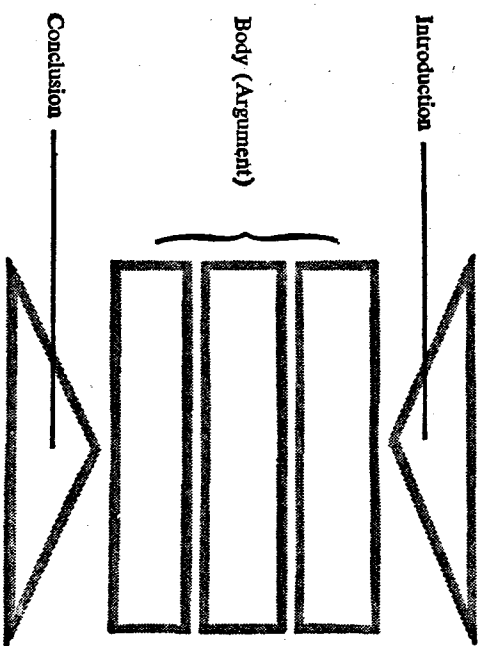


Figure 1—Structure of the Essay

Think of each of the units in Figure 1 as one paragraph. Certain obvious characteristics show up at once: (1) the first, or introductory, paragraph begins broadly and narrows to a point; (2) the middle section, or "argument," is in block form and takes up most of the space in the essay; and (3) the last, or concluding, paragraph begins at a narrow point and ends broadly.

We will return again and again to this illustration as we progress, demonstrating methods of working with it, of tying the parts firmly together, of enriching it with detail. As it stands now, it represents the "bare bones" of structure, the steel framework upon which every essay must be built. *This basic structure never changes.* It may be so skillfully disguised by the author that you are not aware of its presence, but it is there. You will find it in every successful essay ever written, from the simplest to the most complex. It will differ only in details; the basic structure is always the same.

Just as different architects, beginning with the same basic design, will create completely different houses, so will essayists create different essays. Each will bring his own particular taste and style to his creation; what he is able to do with the basic structure depends upon his imagination, his wit, his vocabulary, his purpose. But he cannot escape the demands of structure.

So let's examine the three main parts of this structure and see how they work.

The Introduction

One paragraph is usually sufficient to introduce an essay. The structure of this paragraph is different from the structure of any other paragraph in the essay because its function is different.

The function of the introductory paragraph is simply to introduce the subject and come to the point.



Figure 2—The Introduction

Examine the sample introduction below:

The American buggy race is a thing of the past, but its spirit is not. It lives on today at a thousand dragstrips, where teen-age boys now race their hotrods just as their grandfathers once raced their horse-drawn rigs. The boy behind the wheel of that roaring modern buggy, however, has a great deal more than his grandfather's daring spirit. He has a machine built mainly with his own hands and a head full of technical knowledge that grandpa never even dreamed about. Every race he drives is not only a contest but a test—a test of his knowledge as well as his skill as a driver. Like his grandfather, he will race every challenger, but today's drag-racing teen-ager is primarily an automotive engineer, as eager to test his theories as to win races.

The paragraph, you will note, opens with a broad, general statement related to the thesis and then gradually narrows to a single point—the thesis itself. Sentence by sentence it "closes in" on the thesis. Structurally it is a triangle resting on one point (Figure 2). It moves from the general to the specific, from "pan shot" to close-up, from broad observation to punch line.

That is its whole purpose—to introduce the subject in a general way and then come to the point. Here again you can see the psychology of argument in operation. Your thesis, remember, is an *opinion*, and nobody wants an opinion exploding in his face in the first sentence of a conversation, written or oral. (An essay, after all, is a kind of conversation between you and the reader.) So begin your introduction with a general statement and end it with your thesis statement.

Understanding this structure is no problem for most students; the problem is in deciding just what kind of opening statement to make. What can you say that will be not merely a general statement but a general statement that will lead logically into a statement of thesis?

This depends largely upon how you plan to develop your thesis. (Thus you begin to reap immediately the benefits of all that work that went into developing a full thesis statement.) But as a rule of thumb, begin your thinking about an opening statement with one major element in your thesis (usually a noun) and make an observation about it that any sensible reader will find acceptable. In either of the two theses about drag racing, for example, the following two terms are the main elements:

drag racing

teen-agers

Or any of the following could be extracted by inference:

future drivers	responsibility
safety	danger
sport	mechanical skills

In the example on page 43, *race* was used as the key word. But any of the other words extracted from the thesis, directly or by inference, could have served as well:

Few of the special hobbies of today's youth raise the blood pressure of most adults to the boiling point as quickly as *drag racing*.

Teen-agers seldom cling very long to any of their hobbies. In a world already overpopulated with automobiles, the training of *future drivers* becomes a matter of increasing importance.

Safety, unfortunately, is a subject that has little glamour. Some kind of *sport* seems to be a natural part of every young man's life.

Perhaps the most common accusation that adults make against young people today is that they lack a sense of *responsibility*.

Probably nothing about young people dismays their elders quite so much as their love of *danger*. Americans have always excelled in *mechanical skills*.

Any of these opening sentences could lead to either thesis—in favor of drag racing or against it. The author has not yet taken a position. But he has marked out his territory; he has announced generally the subject he is going to cover, and his announcement serves notice that he plans to state a very particular point of view by the end of the paragraph.

A kind of logic asserts itself as you work your way from the opening general statement to the specific thesis. You can see it easily in the example on page 43. The author has chosen to introduce the subject by means of a comparison with the past—one of the simplest of all techniques because we tend to think in terms of time. The sequential logic—from buggy race to hotrod race—is obvious, and it immediately sets up a whole background against which the particular case for or against drag racing can be viewed.

The essay could just as easily have taken off in the opposite direction after the opening statement:

The American buggy race is a thing of the past, but its spirit is not. Unfortunately, its spirit has undergone almost as complete a transformation as the racetrack and the ve-

hicles themselves. The dirt track of the county fair has become a dragstrip, the buggy has become a hotrod, and the daring but friendly spirit of contest has become a frightening and obsessive competition—often to the death.

It would not be necessary, of course, to start as far back as the buggy with your opening statement:

The American passion for speed reaches its highest peak of frenzy every year at the Indianapolis Speedway. Such frenzy was bound to spill over into the everyday life of a country addicted to motors. And spill over it has—into thousands of makeshift racetracks where American youngsters put their lives on the line almost daily . . .

From here on, the writer would begin to narrow toward his thesis. Note that it could still go either way. If he adds "in a blind dedication to speed," the thesis will definitely be against drag racing. If he adds "But it is not a blind dedication to speed that motivates the boys on the dragstrips any more than it motivates the skilled mechanics who drive or service the Speedway racers," the thesis will obviously support drag racing.

Other methods of opening with a general statement (without reference to time) can be seen in the samples on page 44. Your choice depends upon the particular emphasis you want to give. But you can be guided by this general rule: your opening statement will *relate* to your thesis but *will not take a position on it*. Then, by a process of qualifying, comparing, illustrating, and gradually limiting the subject, you quietly remove the major obstacles to discussion and get to the point. And there is your thesis at the end of the paragraph, clearly isolated and ready for examination.

NO BOMBS, PLEASE

One of the commonest errors of beginning writers is to attempt a "terribly clever" opening. You should remember that the demand upon you is for clarity, logic, reasonableness—never for surprise or "gag lines." Your job is to convince the reader of the reasonableness of your thesis and thereby of your reasonableness and wisdom as a human being. *Never* try to be "cute." Almost without exception, the results are disastrous. Consider, for example, these typical "bombshell" openings:

Drag racing! How parents hate it! How kids love it!
Zoom! Powiel! Varoom! We're off!

OR

Wheel! Just listen to that roar! The draggers are really
hot tonight!

OR

Take four wheels, a little metal and glass and some gaso-
line. Mix well and add one boy. What have you got? A
drag racer!

Writing as painfully bad as this is born of a perfectly sound impulse—the desire to be interesting. Unfortunately, its effect is exactly the opposite. Almost invariably this kind of “sound effect” writing is merely a desperate attempt to cover up the absence of any real thought or imagination. It says nothing, but it makes a great racket. (The exclamation points alone are almost enough to cause permanent deafness.) The third example above is less noisy than very, very tired—the old “recipe-writing dodge” that was never very clever and has not improved with use. The road to interesting and colorful writing does not lie in this direction.

It lies, first of all, in an understanding of structure. The lamentable examples above would never have been written if their student authors had followed the simple structural pattern of the introductory paragraph: broad generalization narrowing to thesis. Remember, the function of the introductory paragraph is simply to introduce the subject and come to the point.

You will discover that it is usually necessary to rewrite your introduction after you have completed the middle section of your essay. Often this middle section opens up new ideas that you will want to incorporate in your introduction. But most writers find they simply cannot get into the main body of their essays until they have “primed the pump” with some kind of introduction, even though they must change it later. So the best policy is to get something down on paper, some general statement leading to your thesis, and then go back to it later, revising and rewriting as needed.

You may feel at first that the structural pattern of the opening paragraph is rigid and limiting, that it does not leave you free to be fully creative. It is, indeed, rigid and limiting—but that is the source of its strength. It provides a steel framework upon which you can build confidently. When you have mastered the basic structure, you can begin to experiment, to take artistic risks with your material. Far from boxing you

In, the structure sets you free to create, to express fully the best that is in you.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the function of the introductory paragraph?
2. “The introductory paragraph can be described as a triangle resting on one point.” Explain.
3. What is the psychological principle behind the practice of opening an introductory paragraph with a broad, noncontroversial statement?
4. What is the rule of thumb for writing the first sentence of an introduction?
5. Explain the meaning of the statement that “the sequential logic—from buggy race to hotrod race—is obvious.”
6. Why do students tend to use “bombshell” opening sentences? Why are such sentences nearly always failures?
7. The author suggests that mastery of structure makes it possible for you to express yourself more freely. Explain how this theory might be applied to one of the following activities: dancing, gymnastics, painting, automobile design, dress design.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Write four different opening sentences for the introductory paragraph you wrote for your last essay assignment (pages 39–40), using the structural pattern described in this section.
2. Write the entire introductory paragraph, beginning with one of the opening sentences in #1.
3. Write an introductory paragraph ending with one of the theses below:
 - a. Folk-singing is more than a fad.
 - b. Today's student tends to be a conformist.
 - c. The chief purpose of higher education is to teach students to think for themselves.

NOTE: You will need this introductory paragraph for your next two assignments. Hang on to it.

The Big Middle Section

The big middle section of your essay—everything between the introduction and the conclusion—can be almost any length.

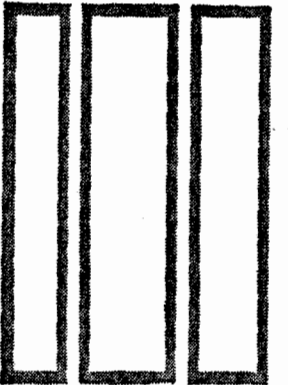


Figure 3—The Middle Section

The number of paragraphs in it depends entirely upon how many points you want to cover and how thoroughly you want to cover them. It would be very foolish to decide in advance precisely how many paragraphs you intend to write—foolish and impossible. All sorts of influences begin working on you when you start writing. You will find yourself thinking, "I'd better use an example here . . . explain a little more clearly there . . . add this point . . . take that one out . . ." Almost the only rule you can follow is this: Write as much as you need to write in order to present your case clearly and completely and persuasively.

Whether your middle section is short or long, it is here that the real power of your essay resides. For the middle section is your argument.

Here you put forward the reasons that will convince the reader of your thesis. And the most brilliant introduction will stagger in mid-flight like a faulty rocket unless you develop the middle section of your essay properly.

Mid-flight power depends upon many things, of course—vocabulary, tone, imagination, originality, style, all the skills of working with language. But the first consideration, the most crucial for the beginner, is *logical development*.

RAPPER TO YOUR FULL THESIS

Fortunately, you are already perfectly prepared. You took care of that when you worked out your *pro* and *con* arguments for your full thesis statement. There they are, lined up and waiting. Before you have finished writing, you may want to

change the order in which you have listed them, but you needn't worry about that yet. Just get started, using your full thesis as a guide. You need only three general rules to guide you:

1. *Make the necessary concessions to the opposition as soon as possible.*
2. *Devote at least one paragraph to every major pro argument in your full thesis statement.*
3. *Save your best argument for the last.*

In a short essay you can usually dispose of the opposition with one or two brief sentences. The whole purpose is to concede quickly the points you do not want to dispute, or to set up quickly those that you feel must be disputed, and then get down to business—that is, the presentation of your *pro* arguments only. So you waste no time. Immediately after your introduction, you make any necessary concessions:

Introduction:

The American buggy race is a thing of the past, but its spirit is not.....

Thesis: Today's drag-racing teen-ager is primarily an automotive engineer (etc.).....

First concession:

Admittedly, drag racing has a certain element of danger. But so has almost every other sport that attracts young men. And drag racing has something that few other sports can claim: an intensely practical value. (Paragraph goes on to develop practical value of drag racing in fostering mechanical skills.)

Second concession:

It is true, of course, that drag racing attracts its share of irresponsible idiots. But . . . (Paragraph goes on to develop the serious attitude of most racers, their respect for rules, etc.)

Note that these concessions take care of the first two *con* arguments listed on page 37. Each concession opens a paragraph, but the paragraph then moves immediately into a *pro* argument that carries far more weight than the concession. You will probably do this naturally, but it's a good idea to keep the process consciously in mind. Never develop a *con* point as fully as you develop a *pro* point. Obviously if you give more space to your opposition than to your own point of

view, you're likely to lose your reader to the enemy camp—or at least make him wonder whether you really believe in your own thesis.

In a short essay two concessions can be joined if they are closely related. The two above, for example, could be placed very easily in one paragraph:

Admittedly, drag racing has a certain element of danger and attracts its share of irresponsible idiots, but . . .

Your decision on whether to name certain *con* points jointly or separately depends upon how much emphasis you want to give each point. If you want to give each point a paragraph, name them separately. If they seem so closely related that one paragraph will suffice for both, name them jointly. Never separate them and then repeat the same arguments just to fill up space. That never fools readers (or teachers). It simply bores and exasperates them beyond endurance.

In a very short essay, you may be able to dismiss all the opposition with a single concession. But if your thesis requires considerable explanation or a very involved defense, you may find it necessary to devote a full paragraph to explaining an opposition point. In that case you must follow it immediately with a full paragraph—or more—in defense of your own position. It's a simple matter of self-preservation. Never allow an opposing point of view to appear stronger than your own. Whatever the length of the essay, the main idea is to get the opposition out of the way as soon as possible, both in the essay itself and in the individual paragraphs. For a clearer understanding of this structure, study Figures 4 and 5, on pages 51-52.

Note that the final paragraphs are devoted exclusively to *pro* arguments. It is always a mistake to allow reservations or concessions to crop up late; it weakens the essay disastrously. Your final paragraphs must be strong and assured, ringing with authority and conviction. Having vanquished your enemy, you need no longer concern yourself with him. You have the floor, and you proceed confidently to take full advantage of it.

YOUR STRONGEST ARGUMENT

Remember that your final argument in this middle section should be your strongest. Naturally the question arises, "How do I tell which argument is strongest?"

The argument that *seems* strongest to you, the one that may have finally decided you in favor of your particular

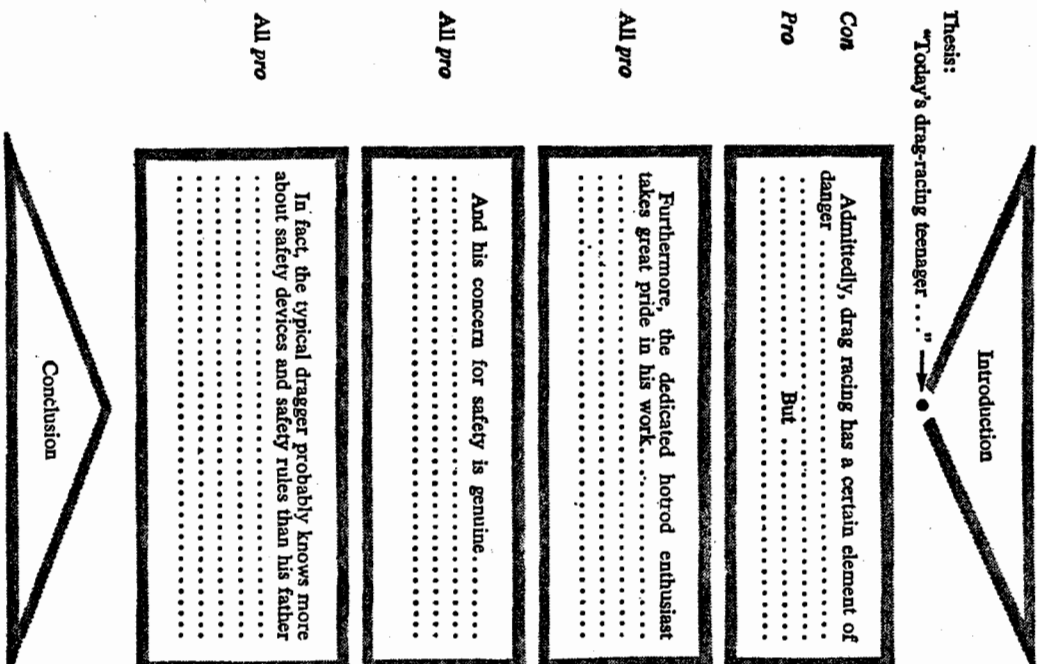


Figure 4—The Short Essay

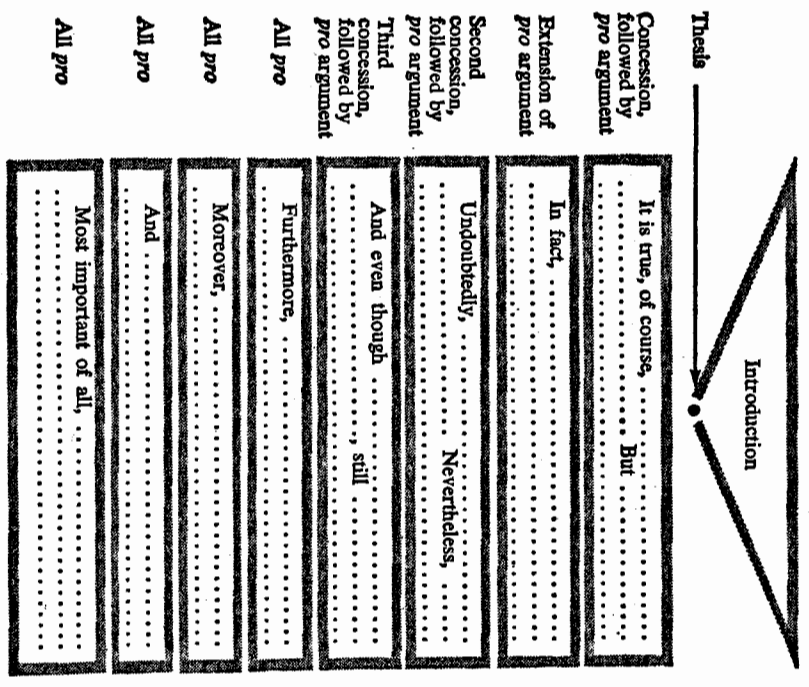


Figure 5—The Longer Essay *

* Bear in mind that the arrangement of early paragraphs here is suggested only. You may want to devote an entire paragraph to a concession or add extra "extensions" of pro arguments. But later paragraphs should concentrate on pro arguments only, as shown.

thesis, will probably be the strongest for your essay. But this is not always true—particularly if your emotions are involved. Remember that argument with your father over using the car? The strongest reason from your point of view was the date you had already made. But such an argument wouldn't cut much ice with your father—not after that dented fender. So you must be sure, in selecting your strongest argument, to base your choice not merely upon personal feeling but upon a sensible awareness of your reader's point of view.

Sometimes in the very process of writing you will find the relative strength of an argument changing. A reason that seemed minor when you first wrote your full thesis may suddenly acquire new meaning and importance through a good example, a new insight, an unexpected phrase. In some mysterious way your writing becomes more vivid and interesting. Looking over your essay later you will think, "That's the best point of all!" In that case it should be moved to the last position, and all other arguments should be used as steppingstones to this major paragraph.

In short, the middle section of your essay should always move toward its most telling paragraph. Never commit yourself in advance to a rigid ordering of paragraphs. Your full thesis is a guide, remember, not a straitjacket. If your essay is humorous, that last paragraph should be the funniest; if your essay emphasizes logic, the last paragraph should be the ultimate in logic; if your essay attempts to present an extremely complex idea, your paragraphs should move from the simplest possible presentation to whatever complexity is required to make your point. This is your last chance to convince your reader. Give him the best you have; this is where you clinch the argument.

QUESTIONS

1. "The real power of your essay resides in the middle section." Explain.
2. How does the full thesis help you in preparing the middle section?
3. Describe the method of handling opposition in both long and short essays.
4. What point should you make last in your argument? Why?

ASSIGNMENT

4. Write a middle section to follow the introduction you wrote for Assignment 3 (page 47). Use the illustration for either

the short or the long essay (Figures 4 and 5) as a guide.
NOTE: Hold on to this assignment. You will need it later.

The Conclusion

You have introduced your subject, presented your thesis, and defended it. One step remains. You must wrap things up in one last paragraph and gracefully withdraw: you must write a conclusion. Otherwise, no matter how thoroughly you have explored every point in your full thesis, your essay will remain a piece of unfinished business, as unsatisfying as a piece of music that never hits its final note.

A student writer who has made his way through most of his essay with style and dash often finds himself baffled by the attempt to conclude. He is like the guest who doesn't quite know how to go home, standing irresolutely at the door, unable to bring himself to open it, forcing the conversation to go on and on—and driving his hosts mad (Or putting them, finally, to sleep). Eventually, incapable of leaving gracefully, he makes a wild bolt for it—which means, in the essayist's terms, that he doesn't write a conclusion at all.

"But I haven't anything else to say," the student complains. "I've used up everything in my full thesis. Where do I look now for ideas?"

The answer may come as a surprise. Look in your introduction.

BACK TO BEGINNINGS

You have come a long way from that opening paragraph. How can you make a connection at this late date with those distant sentences, written when your essay was only a few notes on a card?

You not only *can* make a connection, you *must* make it if the paragraphs you have written so far are ever to take on the solid shape and feel of an essay.

Since so much depends upon this connection, it makes sense to take a final, critical look at your introduction. Can you see any way to improve that first paragraph? In all likelihood, you can. The process of writing the middle section nearly always opens your eyes to new possibilities for your introduction. So double back. Now is the time to rewrite it if it needs rewriting. Any improvements you can make will almost certainly be reflected in your conclusion.

Then, with your introduction in its best possible shape, it is time to think about your conclusion.

UNDERSTAND THE STRUCTURE

Again, an understanding of basic structure can help you. The structure of the conclusion (Figure 6) is exactly the reverse of the structure underlying your introduction, which began with a broad general statement and narrowed to its point, or thesis.



Figure 6—The Conclusion

Your conclusion begins with the thesis and widens gradually toward a final broad statement.

So, to get your conclusion started, simply repeat your thesis sentence, adding an appropriate word or phrase, if necessary, to tie it in properly with the paragraph that preceded it:

Thesis: Today's drag-racing teen-ager is primarily an automotive engineer. . . .

Restated thesis: In short, today's drag-racing teen-ager is, primarily, an automotive engineer. . . .

And the first sentence of your conclusion is already written for you. You need only lift it out of your introduction and drop it into place.

Often, however, this straight transfer of thesis seems flat and uninteresting. In that case, vary the wording. You can vary it in dozens of ways without changing the meaning. The following variations, for example, do the trick without repeating the exact words of the thesis:

Clearly then, this young man is no irresponsible bum; he's an automotive engineer. . . .

An automotive engineer, an expert driver, a specialist in safety—that is the real definition of today's drag racer. . . .

From this point you will begin to broaden toward your final sentence. As you do so, you can make a still stronger con-

tion with your introduction by picking up any significant word or phrase in it and working it into your conclusion. Every time you do this you create echoes in a reader's mind, touch a nerve of remembrance. You might, for example, use the word "buggy" in your next sentence—"He may contrast strangely with his buggy-driving ancestors . . ."—thus sounding a note you struck in your opening sentence (see sample introduction, page 43).

When you create an echo like this, the reader does not say to himself consciously, "Oh, yes, that was mentioned earlier." He simply has that particular sense of satisfaction and completion that comes to all of us when we feel that everything is falling into place, that things "fit."

Sometimes it is possible to conclude a very short essay by borrowing only from the introduction. Ordinarily, however, you need further ties with the middle section in order to give your conclusion substance.

TYING IN THE MIDDLE SECTION

Many student essays run aground in the final paragraph because the writer attempts to summarize the points he has made simply by listing them. "In the preceding paragraphs it was shown that drag racers are good mechanics, that they are expert drivers, and that they are safe drivers." This listing of points, as though you are adding up a column of figures, is deadly. Your reader does not like to be reminded in this heavy-handed way of something he has just finished reading.

Try, instead, to suggest, to leave your reader with a series of pictures in his mind rather than a series of blunt and graceless declarations. Borrow meaning from your middle section, borrow a few key words, but don't be flatly repetitive, don't make lists. Say what you have already said, but say it sharply, quickly, and in different words. Look at the difference in the two sample conclusions below, both written for an essay that stressed the drag racer's mechanical skill, his pride in workmanship, and his knowledge of safety:

Therefore, today's drag-racing teen-ager is primarily an automotive engineer. The preceding paragraphs have shown that he has a great deal of mechanical skill, he takes pride in his workmanship, and he has much knowledge of safety.

Clearly, then, the typical drag-racing teen-ager is no irresponsible bum, but a genuine automotive engineer. His mechanical skill verges on inventive genius, and his pride in workmanship is a sign of his maturity. Furthermore, he could give most adults lessons in safety.

The first example repeats the thesis verbatim and summarizes the points as if they were items on a laundry list. The second varies the words of the thesis and disperses the points in two separate (and differently constructed) sentences. With one or two more sentences, the paragraph could move outward, relating drag racing to a broader background and closing on a final, authoritative note:

. . . One thing is certain: the drag racer is a product of his times. The society he lives in has been shaped by the automobile, and drag racing is as natural to him as buggy racing was to his grandfather. Society might as well learn not only to accept him but to appreciate his talents. He'll be around as long as we keep moving on wheels. And that is likely to be a very long time indeed.

And the essay has reached its end. The conclusion, borrowing from everything that has gone before, summarizing without repeating exactly, has given the essay its final shape, has made it into a whole, compact, self-sustaining unit.

Borrow. Suggest. Transform. Pull out words and phrases and place them in a new setting. *Remind your reader.* Then move outward with a statement that relates your thesis to a broader background, so that he can see it in a last long perspective.

Remember, your conclusion is your last word with your reader, your last chance to persuade him of the truth in your thesis. Take advantage of it.

Summary

Think of your essay as a structure, as something that you actually build according to a definite architectural pattern. You will find it far easier to say what you want to say when you have a sense of structure, for it imposes on your thoughts the discipline of logic, which in turn develops your ability to organize and to make relationships.

Every essay has three major parts: an introduction that states the thesis and that can be seen structurally as a triangle resting on one point; a middle section, structurally a large block, made up of several smaller blocks of argument; and a conclusion, another triangle resting on a broad-based generalization related to the rest of the essay. Whether an essay is long or short it will have this structure, and you can learn specific techniques for writing each of the three major structural parts and relating them to one another.

Once you have mastered this structure you are ready for the really exciting part of writing: the study of style. That begins in the next chapter. Most of the writing you have done so far has simply familiarized you with your instrument. Soon you will discover what kind of music it can make. But be sure you know your instrument first. Stay with structure until you understand it thoroughly.

QUESTIONS

1. Since the middle section of an essay covers all the points in the full thesis, why does an essay need a concluding paragraph?
2. How does the introduction help you write a conclusion?
3. Why is it likely that you will need to rewrite your introduction before writing a conclusion?
4. Describe the structure of a conclusion.
5. "Every time you pick up a significant word or phrase from preceding paragraphs and work it into your conclusion, you create echoes in a reader's mind." Explain this statement.
6. How can you summarize without listing?
7. Explain what is meant by "broadening" your concluding paragraph to its final sentence.

ASSIGNMENT

5. Look again at the introduction and middle section that you wrote for Assignments 3 and 4. Rewrite your introduction. Then write a concluding paragraph.
6. Write a complete essay on one of the following subjects:

cats	basketball	careers
dogs	football	college
horses	track	money problems

VOCABULARY

1. Using your dictionary, write a definition for each of the following words:
- | | | |
|--------------|------------|----------|
| argument | lamentable | tendency |
| disconsolate | obsessive | close-up |
| intolerably | repetitive | pan shot |
| irresolutely | sequential | |

2. Each of the words above is used here in a complete sentence followed by part of another sentence. Finish each of the incomplete sentences so that it *explains or illustrates* the first sentence.

- a. Most people think of an argument as a quarrel. In an essay, however, an argument
- b. She was disconsolate. She
- c. The man was intolerably rude. He
- d. The boy stood irresolutely at the door. He could not decide whether to
- e. Her wardrobe was in lamentable condition. Everything she owned
- f. The man showed obsessive concern for his health in many ways. He
- g. He made some good points, but he was repetitive. I got tired of
- h. The problems were arranged in sequential order, according to their difficulty. The most difficult problem
- i. She has a tendency to be overcritical. She seems to feel that
- j. The close-up scenes were particularly effective. One shot concentrated on the old man's hands, and you could see
- k. Films often open with a wide pan shot. In a western movie, for example, the camera usually sets the scene by

5

First Steps Toward Style

By now you should have the "feel" of an essay, the sense of it as a structure. Structure alone, however, does not guarantee a good essay any more certainly than an artist's first charcoal sketch on canvas guarantees a good oil painting. The original sketch may be strong, interesting, and full of promise, but the final judgment of the work rests upon the artist's use of his paints.

In the same way, the final judgment of a piece of writing depends upon the writer's use of words. You may have devised You may have a brilliant thesis. You may have devised