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Five-Paragraph Essay

When it comes to writing essays in college, we all need a place to start. Think of the five-paragraph essay as just that. Some students may find this to be a simple process, while others may spend a greater amount of time understanding this basic building block of college writing. Whatever the case, use the following guidelines to strengthen your knowledge of this preliminary essay format. Five-paragraph essays are incredibly useful in two situations – when writers are just starting out and when a writing assignment is timed.

The five-paragraph essay has three basic parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.

The **introduction** is the first paragraph of the essay, and it serves several purposes. This paragraph gets your reader's attention, develops the basic ideas of what you will cover, and provides the thesis statement for the essay. The thesis statement is usually only one sentence and is made up of the topic, focus, and three points of the essay.

The **body** appears directly after the introduction. The body consists of three paragraphs that are based on the thesis statement of the essay.

Each body paragraph should start with a transition – either a word or phrase, like First, or Another important point is. Then, the first sentence should continue with your topic sentence. The topic sentence tells your reader what the paragraph is about, like a smaller-level thesis statement. The rest of the paragraph will be made of supporting sentences. These sentences, at least four of them, will explain your topic sentence to your reader.

Be sure that each sentence in the paragraph directly addresses both your topic sentence and your thesis statement. If you have a point to make that is not directly connected to the topic sentence, it does not belong in the paragraph. You might write a different paragraph on that other point, but you may not stick it into any old paragraph just because you thought of it at that point. (You can't stick a red towel into a load of white laundry without causing damage to the rest of the clothes, and you can't stick a point that's off-topic into a paragraph without doing damage to the rest of the essay. Keep your laundry and your paragraph points separate!)

Topic sentences and supporting details should follow the order first presented in the thesis statement. Using transitions from point to point will add cohesiveness to the essay.

The **conclusion** is the last paragraph of the essay. This paragraph brings the essay to a close, reminds the reader of the basic ideas from the essay, and restates the thesis statement. The conclusion should not contain new ideas, as it is the summation of the content of the essay. The re-statement of the thesis is a simpler form than the one originally presented in the introduction.

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An outline is often used to demonstrate the content of most 5-paragraph essays:

- I. Introduction
- II. Body
 - A. First Point
 - B. Second Point
 - C. Third Point
- III. Conclusion

Before we finish, it's important to remember that the format of the five-paragraph essay is the foundation of nearly every other essay you'll write. When you get ready to write longer papers, remember that the job of the introduction and conclusion are just the same as they are in the five-paragraph essay. Also, when you write longer papers, change your idea of support from three body **paragraphs** to three (or two or four) body **sections**, with as many paragraphs as necessary in each section (just as you had as many sentences you needed in each body paragraph).

Below is an example of a 5-paragraph essay. Notice how the essay follows the outline.

Enjoying Your Camping Trip

Each year, thousands of people throughout the United States choose to spend their vacations camping in the great outdoors. Depending on an individual's sense of adventure, there are various types of camping to choose from, including log cabin camping, recreational vehicle camping, and tent camping. Of these, tent camping involves "roughing it" the most, and with proper planning the experience can be gratifying. Even with the best planning, however, tent camping can be an extremely frustrating experience due to uncontrolled factors such as bad weather, wildlife encounters, and equipment failures.

Nothing can dampen the excited anticipation of camping more than a dark, rainy day. Even the most adventurous campers can lose some of their enthusiasm on the drive to the campsite if the skies are dreary and damp. After reaching their destination, campers must then "set up camp" in the downpour. This includes keeping the inside of the tent dry and free from mud, getting the sleeping bags situated dryly, and protecting food from the downpour. If the sleeping bags happen to get wet, the cold also becomes a major factor. A sleeping bag usually provides warmth on a camping trip; a wet sleeping bag provides none. Combining wind with rain can cause frigid temperatures, causing any outside activities to be delayed. Even inside the tent problems may arise due to heavy winds. More than a few campers have had their tents blown down because of the wind, which once again begins the frustrating task of "setting up camp" in the downpour. It is wise to check the weather forecast before embarking on camping trips; however, mother nature is often unpredictable and there is no guarantee bad weather will be eluded.

Another problem likely to be faced during a camping trip is run-ins with wildlife, which can range from mildly annoying to dangerous. Minor inconveniences include mosquitoes and ants. The swarming of mosquitoes can literally drive annoyed campers indoors. If an effective repellent is not used, the camper can spend an interminable night scratching, which will only worsen

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the itch. Ants do not usually attack campers, but keeping them out of the food can be quite an inconvenience. Extreme care must be taken not to leave food out before or after meals. If food is stored inside the tent, the tent must never be left open. In addition to swarming the food, ants inside a tent can crawl into sleeping bags and clothing. Although these insects cause minor discomfort, some wildlife encounters are potentially dangerous. There are many poisonous snakes in the United States, such as the water moccasin and the diamond-back rattlesnake. When hiking in the woods, the camper must be careful where he steps. Also, the tent must never be left open. Snakes, searching for either shade from the sun or shelter from the rain, can enter a tent. An encounter between an unwary camper and a surprised snake can prove to be fatal. Run-ins can range from unpleasant to dangerous, but the camper must realize that they are sometimes inevitable.

Perhaps the least serious camping troubles are equipment failures; these troubles often plague families camping for the first time. They arrive at the campsite at night and haphazardly set up their nine-person tent. They then settle down for a peaceful night's rest. Sometime during the night the family is awakened by a huge crash. The tent has fallen down. Sleepily, they awake and proceed to set up the tent in the rain. In the morning, everyone emerges from the tent, except for two. Their sleeping bag zippers have gotten caught. Finally, after fifteen minutes of struggling, they free themselves, only to realize another problem. Each family member's sleeping bag has been touching the sides of the tent. A tent is only waterproof if the sides are not touched. The sleeping bags and clothing are all drenched. Totally disillusioned with the "vacation," the frustrated family packs up immediately and drives home. Equipment failures may not seem very serious, but after campers encounter bad weather and annoying pests or wild animals, these failures can end any remaining hope for a peaceful vacation.

These three types of camping troubles can strike campers almost anywhere. Until some brilliant scientist invents a weather machine to control bad weather or a kind of wildlife repellent, unlucky campers will continue to shake their fists in frustration. More than likely, equipment will continue to malfunction. Even so, camping continues to be a favorite pastime of people all across the United States. If you want camping to be a happy experience for you, learn to laugh at leaky tents, bad weather, and bugs, or you will find yourself frustrated and unhappy.