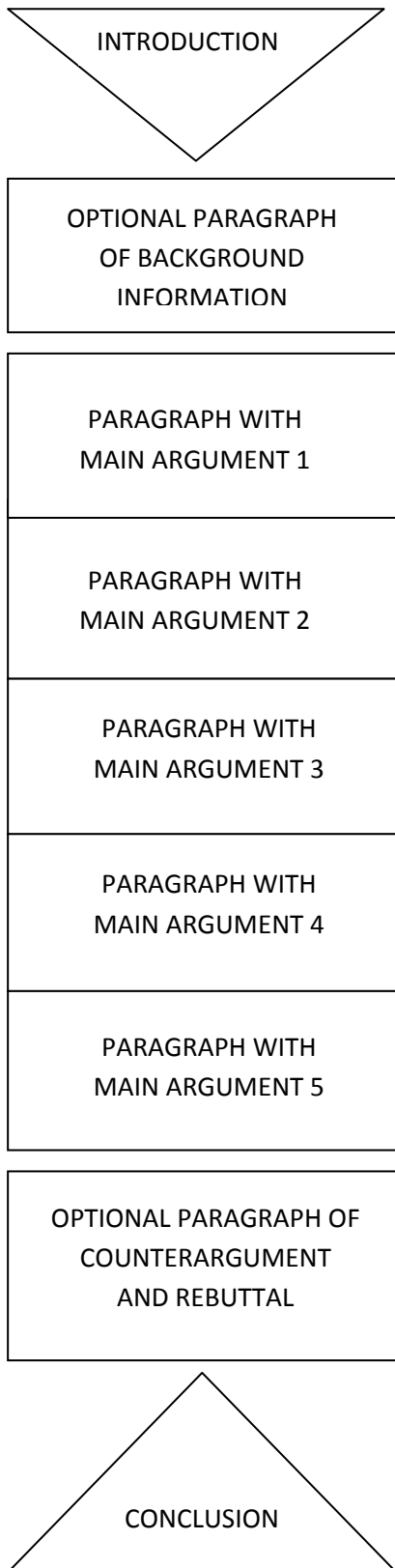


Diagram of an Essay



Introduction should be one paragraph of no more than three or four sentences. Begin with a general statement, uncontroversial about the topic. Move with the next sentence or two slowly toward your thesis or overall argument. End with a succinct, one-sentence **thesis statement**, summing up the whole of your argument.

If you have a lot of **background information** you feel is necessary for your reader to follow your argument, don't try to cram it all into the introduction. Instead, follow the introduction with a paragraph, beginning by explaining that some background information is necessary to your arguments. Keep the background information pertinent and in only one paragraph.

Each of the **main paragraphs of your essay** should provide the main arguments for your thesis. Each paragraph should stand alone, so avoid returning to points or information already given in a previous paragraph. Each should begin with a clear **topic sentence**, telling the reader what the paragraph is about and how it relates to the overall thesis. Then it should provide two or three separate examples from the historical source or sources, each with its own footnote or endnote, providing proofs of the claim made in the topic sentence. If you are comparing or contrasting two sources, you should provide two separate examples from each, either together in a larger paragraph or in pairs of shorter paragraphs (each with their own topic sentences). Don't let your paragraphs get more than a page long. Don't repeat the topic sentence, reworded, at the end of the paragraph or begin the topic of the next paragraph there.

Begin your essay's main paragraphs with your strongest argument, and work to your weakest. If you need a longer essay, simply add more arguments. Another trick is to add a paragraph. Begin by making a concession to the opposite thesis, making it clear that this is not your opinion, and giving one or two examples that might support the other thesis. Then explain why these examples don't really count or aren't that important, so that your thesis still stands. I call this a **paragraph of concession** or one of counterargument and rebuttal.

Keep your **conclusion** short, too, no more than a paragraph. Begin by restating your **thesis statement**, now that it's been proved. Don't bother to restate your main arguments, unless you can do it very briefly, in a sentence or two. Instead, keep the focus of the remainder of the conclusion on the significance of your essay: now that you've proved your thesis, what does it tell us about history or human nature more generally or broadly?

Note: All words in bold on this description are described in greater detail elsewhere in the Help for Writing pages of my website.