

5 Paragraph Essay: how to and why

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<http://chazda.com/5-paragraph-essay/>

I'm currently teaching some of my students how to structure a 3-Pronged 5-Paragraph Essay. Understanding and being able to use this type of essay structure is an incredibly important and valuable skill. If you can do this and do it well, it will improve every aspect of your life. It's all about making a logical and powerful point.

Teenaged students tend to believe that the 5 Paragraph Essay is a writing task that teachers simply assign to keep you busy – that this is something you will never need in The Real World. Wrong. *Really* wrong.

Now it's true that your employer will rarely (if ever) ask for a 5 Paragraph Essay. But they *will* ask you to:

- argue a point in a contract (to the client), or to
- make a brief presentation (in a meeting), or to
- prove your point.

So this is really something you'll use every day of your life, even if only orally.

What this isn't.

To be clear, this isn't a summary. A summary can also be 5 paragraphs, but that isn't what I'm tackling here. It also isn't a rhetoric exercise.

About Rhetoric: In a classic rhetoric type of 5 Paragraph Essay, the Body is different. The first body paragraph should be a review of the background. The second body paragraph should be your proof for your argument. The third body paragraph should be about any arguments against your point.

The purpose of a 5 paragraph essay is, essentially, to clearly express or argue your point of view. Not that your essay should be angry or argumentative - just that you should win over your audience to what you think or feel - about something.

I'm going to LABEL each individual part of this 3-prong essay, and insert notes. **The actual essay content has a bright blue bar next to it.**

TITLE

The Importance of a Thank You

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, I have often wondered how I affect other people. I hope that impact has been positive, but I know that I have hurt people, too. In [Jarrett Krosoczka's TED Talk about "Why Lunch Ladies Are Heroes,"](#) I am reminded of the importance of a simple Thank You.

Note: This is my first paragraph, the Introduction. I've decided to make this personal, about how I experience this TED Talk. I could have approached this differently, but this is what I wanted to write.

About the last sentence of the first paragraph: This particular sentence is important, because it's your Hook. A Hook is what gets people to keep reading – or keep listening, if this is an oral presentation.

THE BODY

BODY PARAGRAPH 1

When [Krosoczka](#) wrote his [first Lunch Lady graphic novel for kids](#), it never occurred to him the impact that symbol of appreciation would have on Jeannie, his own childhood Lunch Lady. She was his inspiration for the superhero series. Much to his surprise, his stories affected her deeply.

Note: This first portion of the Body explains more information about what I want to discuss. I could just as easily decided to make the Body paragraphs more like bullet-points, but I chose to go with something more conversational.

Characteristics of the first body paragraph: it should be about one of these things:

- The strongest argument, or
- The most important/significant example, or
- The obvious beginning point.

For my essay example here, I've chosen the obvious beginning point. The last sentence should lead us smoothly into the next paragraph.

BODY PARAGRAPH 2

Upon Jeannie's funeral, that first book was displayed along with a large photograph of Jeannie posing with Krosoczka, the author. It was only then that he realized how much it mattered. Showing appreciation always matters.

Note: I could have chosen to write about a completely different aspect of the Talk, but I wanted to express a more gradual progression of the concept.

Characteristics of the second body paragraph: it should be about one of these things:

- The second strongest argument, or
- The second most important/significant example, or
- The obvious follow up of the previous paragraph.

Be sure that you are consistent in which of these 3 types you choose to write. If you've chosen an argument in the first paragraph, you should follow-through with arguments in all three parts of the body.

If you've chosen an Example for the first paragraph, then stick with that all the way through. Since I started with an obvious beginning point, I'm following through with the best way to follow-up that line of thinking.

BODY PARAGRAPH 3

So Krosoczka decided to found a School Lunch Hero Day, a special event when students could show their appreciation to the ladies who feed them every school day. The children make cards and fun craft projects as gifts, and the lunch ladies are shown how valued their efforts are. I imagine most lunch ladies never realize how important their job really is simply because no one tells them.

Characteristics of the third body paragraph: it should be about one of these things:

- The weakest argument, or
- The weakest example, or
- The obvious follow-up to the second paragraph.

Note: Not that the third paragraph should be weak in any way – just that of the three points you must make, this should be the weakest.

This last portion of the Body should lead smoothly into the concluding paragraph.

CONCLUSION

I've been unappreciated before, one of the invisible. But to my shame, I've also neglected to show my thanks, to be aware – fully – of the efforts of others. Jarrett Krosoczka's Talk and his wonderful project remind me to think again, to consider others and realize how fortunate I am that we are all here, helping each other, together.

Note: This is the conclusion, so that means it **MUST** refer back to what you wrote in the Introduction. Because my intro is about how this TED Talk made me feel, my conclusion is about that as well.

Another nice thing to do in a 5 Paragraph Essay is to use a quote (it can be from anyone, even your grandma) in the Introduction, and then tie that into the Conclusion.

Characteristics of the Conclusion:

- it must mirror the tone and structure of the Introduction,
- it should refer briefly to the Body contents, and
- the last sentence should clearly signal the end.

Questions?

Let me know if you have any questions about this. Please decide now what topic you'd like to tackle for your own 5 Paragraph Essay. I highly recommend cruising [TED Talks](#) for topics, but you can choose anything you want. The important thing is that it be something you **WANT** to discuss.

If you'd like to view the TED Talk that inspired me, here it is:
