



Speedreading: Structure of Well-Written Material

Academic Material

The five-paragraph essay is used in writing classes to teach concise writing. Thus, it provides an excellent model to understand the way chapters in larger academic works are often organized.

Introductory Paragraph

- Starts with something to motivate you to read on.
- Includes a thesis sentence, stating the main point of the essay. This sentence may include a “map” of the main thoughts that will be developed to support the essay thesis.

First Body Paragraph

- Usually starts with a topic sentence (one of the thoughts from the “map”).
- Is followed by statements and information that prove or reinforce the topic sentence.

Second, Third, and Fourth Paragraphs

- Contain topic sentences (related to the other thoughts from the “map”) near the beginning.
- Topic sentences are followed by supporting information.

Fifth Paragraph

- Iterates the thesis.
- Concludes.

For an excellent example, see <http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/English/essay/conclusion.html>.

Book chapters and sections within chapters are often variations on this theme.

- The first one or two paragraphs usually tell you the main ideas that will be developed. Read these carefully.
- Subsequent paragraphs often state, within the first two sentences, the idea each will be developing. Read on as far as you need, in order to understand the author’s viewpoint and argument.
- Concluding paragraphs usually recap the overall theme.

News Articles

- First paragraph contains the key points.
- Subsequent paragraphs add additional details.

Opinion Articles

- Introduction and summary usually encapsulate core ideas.
- Body paragraphs develop the author’s point of view, usually with examples.