



## Organizing an Essay

A solid essay has many related components that fit together to produce a whole piece of writing. The pieces that make up an essay should follow a clear order and help illustrate the writer's thesis statement/controlling idea.

**STEP 1** – Arrange your thoughts in a hierarchy of ideas (arrange them from **general to specific**)

For example:

- Art (general)
- Painters
- Expressionist Painters
- Vincent Van Gogh
- Van Gogh's painting "Starry Night" (specific)

**STEP 2** – Organize by creating a rough outline. The informal outline should begin with a **thesis statement**. The thesis statement should be direct and to the point, and it should map out what is to come in the essay.

For example:

**The United States is a nation of constant ethnic conflict.**

The above thesis statement clearly states an opinion/ idea that can be supported or denied using factual information. It guides the direction of the essay for the reader and for the writer.

After you've written this thesis statement, use it to guide a list of the main points that you would use to develop that thesis. These main points will be the basis of your rough outline.

**STEP 3** – Structure the essay into three parts—**an introduction, body, and conclusion**.

- The **introduction** presents the writer's plan for the essay and prepares the reader for what is to follow in the body of the essay.
- The **body** of the essay develops the main points of the essay by offering examples, details, reasons, and other support for the reader to agree with the thesis statement presented earlier.
- The **conclusion** summarizes and synthesizes the introduction and body of the essay (\*remember to restate the thesis statement in this section for emphasis of the main idea). The conclusion may also suggest a course of action or serve to inspire the reader with a powerful closing thought that the reader didn't know when he/she began reading the essay.

Fowler, H. Ramsey, Jane E. Aaron, and Kay Limberg. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. 5 th Ed. NY: Harper Collins, 1992.