

“Research” or Expository Essays: Body Requirements and Outline



An expository essay is what most generally think of when they think of a “research” essay. This type of essay can be informative about events, phenomena, or ideas. Or this type of essay can compare things, or giving instructions on how to do something.

The reason “research” is in quotation marks is because, while an extensive amount of research is involved in this type of essay, it gives the wrong impression about what goes into a “research essay.” “Research essay” implies that all one has to do to write one is look up a bunch of information and then simply regurgitate (throw up) that information into an essay format without thought or personal insight. This is simply not the case. If it were the case, your instructors would have you just turn in a list of URLs and call it good.

In an expository essay, you will conduct an extensive and thorough investigation through research (*remember the folder in this course entitled “Starting with a Search”?*) to become an expert on your subject. Then, you will formulate a claim regarding this research - this claim is your thesis statement! (*Please review the information on thesis statements on the “Thesis Statement” link about said statements located in “The Dreaded...THESIS” folder.*)



Please don't eat a lot of information and then throw it back up!!



Remember, that even when you aren't writing a persuasive paper, you will be making a claim in your thesis statement. That claim is one that you will then be proving with the body of your essay. Even if your claim is something very straight forward, like “Polar bears have white fur to blend in with their native habitat and black skin to absorb the rays from the sun,” you will need to support it with research based evidence.

One last thing – a good rule of thumb when writing an expository paper, is to try to hit the **2:1 ratio of your thoughts to evidence**. In other words, about 1/3 of your paper should consist of research, while about 2/3 should be your own thoughts, insight, interpretation, and analysis.



The following outline is going to look very familiar. That's because it is the outline that was used as the basic example for the outlining tutorial. I have included some instructions (different from those in the Introduction to Outlining) below and also an example of what an actual outline for an expository essay would look like.

A typical expository outline will look something like this:

Remember, it is difficult to decide what should go in your introduction before you have written the body of your paper – so you don't have to put anything here yet – besides your thesis statement.

Topic of body paragraph - each body paragraph needs to have a focused topic. **The topic of each body paragraph needs to directly support your thesis statement.**

Just like your thesis will have a pinpoint focus, each body paragraph should have a specific topic with a clear focus.

Students often struggle with this. They want to write whatever comes to mind, or go on a tangent rather than keeping their paragraphs focused. Outlining will help you avoid this trap.



There should be at least one – if not two supporting points for each body paragraph. Each point being supported by research based evidence and then interpreted by you.

If you find that you have LOTS of supporting points for your body paragraph topic – you may want to split it up into multiple paragraphs that have an even more narrow focus.

As you may recall – as goes for the introduction, so goes for the conclusion...so don't worry about adding more detail to this quite yet.

Remember, that this exact format is not set in stone. You don't always need to have 2 supporting points for each topic sentence, which are supported by 2 pieces of evidence. But you do need to include this much detail. This is why there isn't an outline form for you to fill out – you need to make **your** outline work for **your** essay.

- I. Introduction
 - i. Thesis statement: (Remember this may be your ONLY full sentence.)
- II. Topic of 1st body paragraph
 - a. 1st Supporting point of topic 1
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - b. 2nd Supporting point of topic 1
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
- III. Topic of 2nd body paragraph
 - a. 1st Supporting point of topic 2
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - b. 2nd Supporting point of topic 2
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
- IV. Topic of 3rd body paragraph
 - a. 1st Supporting point of topic 3
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - b. 2nd Supporting point of topic 3
 - i. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
 - ii. Evidence
 1. Analysis of evidence
- V. Conclusion

A Word to the Wise

If you hate back tracking and wasting time (and who doesn't), start keeping track of your sources now!!



Here is what an actual, working outline might look like:

- I. Introduction
 - a. Thesis: The history of Shih Tzu has been inseparably interwoven with the political history of the Far East and later the world, from being bred for royalty, to almost inhalation during the rise of communism to their proliferation today.
- II. Official dogs of the Chinese Imperial family
 - a. Star on head indicate Shih Tzu decedents of Buddha's lion dog
 - i. "The color spot located on the forehead of the dogs is the place where the noble teacher bent down and placed a kiss whereas the flash of white on the same area is said to be the place where Buddha laid his finger in blessing." (healthguidance.org)
 - 1. Served as evidence the imperial family was destined to rule and had the support of Buddha himself Served many purposes for the royal family
 - b. Only royals were allowed to have them
 - i. "Anyone who attempted to acquire one illegally was usually put to death." (Sucher, Jaime)
 - 1. Highly valued and rare
 - 2. Status symbol – Like a Ferrari
- III. Communism brought Shih Tzu to the brink of extinction
 - a. Symbols of the previous regime
 - i. Communist revolutionaries purposefully killed Shih Tzu (easypetmd.com)
 - 1. Had to be eliminated
 - ii. Communism = atheism (Marx, Karl)
 - 1. Symbols of Buddhism had to be eliminated
 - b. The Three Years of Great Chinese Famine
 - i. China says 15 mill died, outsiders estimate 20-43 million died – drought, poor weather and communist party policies combined to create famine (Xizhe, Peng)
 - 1. Made feeding pets impossible – any dogs left likely died or were eaten
- IV. From near oblivion to hugely popular – globalization of the modern world
 - a. Breed survival tied to 13 surviving Shih Tzu outside the country
 - i. China refused to trade them to outsiders – but did give as gifts to foreign visitors
 - ii. First to leave - trio acquired by Lady Brownrigg of England in about 1930 (easypetmd.com)
 - 1. Owners got together and bred
 - b. Shih Tzu spread to the US
 - i. American soldiers brought them home from England after WWII (healthguidance.org)
 - 1. The world gets smaller after WWII
 - ii. 2013 - 15th most popular breed in the US (akc.org)
 - c. Shih Tzu can be found around the world today
 - i. Population unknown, US breeders have exported to Russia, Latvia, Italy, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, China, Israel, Slovak Republic, Singapore (blackberry-shihtzu.com)
 - 1. Spread of Shih Tzu = interconnected global community
- V. Conclusion

This is a full sentence because it is a direct quote that will be used in the paper.

Smarty! The sources are noted for easy citations later on!

Topic of paragraph

Sub-point 1

Evidence 1

Analysis 1

Evidence 2

Analysis 2

Sub-point 2

Evidence 1

Analysis 1

This paragraph follows the 2:1 rule of thumb 😊



This essay doesn't follow the exact format above – but it is close. The points the author needed to make and the evidence dictated the exact format of the outline

Notice the detail! This is what your instructor wants to see. This outline is a road map of the essay – turn for turn.