

Research Paper Structure: Expository & Argument

Moorpark College *Writing* Center

- I. Introduction/Opening
 - A. Build the case for your thesis through one of these forms:
 1. Establish the broad topic and move toward your narrow topic
 2. Provide an example or experience as context for the reader
 3. Set a scene for the problem or show some startling facts
 4. Ask the questions that lead to your thesis as the answer
 - B. End the introduction with a **THESIS STATEMENT** in which you do the following:
 1. State a specific and narrow topic
 2. Indicate the argument being made (in other words, your position, claim, or assertion).
- II. Background Section: Provides a context for the research that will follow this section. This may include any of the following:
 - A. History
 - B. Context of thesis:
 1. Problem or need
 2. Environment or situation
 - C. Theoretical background
 1. For empirical research, trace back through the body of published research that supports a theory that is a premise for your argument
 2. Create operational definitions of key theories or terms that will be used
- III. Body: State the case and offer up evidence
 - A. **Present a clear plan** of attack/strategy
 1. Divide into discernable sub-topics
 2. Use a **logical pattern** of organization. Always follow the pattern that makes the most logical sense with (1) your topic, (2) the evidence/research you have found, and (3) your argument. Here are some options:
 - a) Chronological
 - b) Sequential
 - c) Least important to most important
 - d) Cause and Effect
 - e) Macro level consideration to Micro level considerations (or reverse)
 - f) Problem to Solution (note: business and technical sciences often follow this model of Problem → Causes/Context → Analysis → Findings → Proposal → Implementation → Testing/Challenges → Findings → Outcome).
 - B. Within each section or the body (which will likely include more than 1 paragraph), organize each paragraph around **ONE key point**
 1. Use a **topic sentence** for each paragraph: name the point being made, and connect it to thesis
 2. Align content/evidence with that topic
 - C. **Build each paragraph.** Use the following list of paragraph elements to help you to be sure you have a fully developed idea in each paragraph. While I list them in an order, you may alter this sequence to suit your content.
 1. **General statement** of the topic for the paragraph (topic sentence)
 2. **Explanation** of that statement
 3. **Evidence:** examples, quotes, statistics/data, descriptions, experiences
 4. **Analysis:** what that evidence *means*
(steps 3 and 4 may repeat as you show connections between one source and another)
 5. **Synthesis:** show the connections among ideas in the paragraph and with your assertion
 - D. **Signpost** your argument: remind the reader of past key points, and/or project what will come next
 - E. **Show continuity of argument:** transitions and comparisons or contrasts
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Place your **main point in perspective:** make it “succinct, bold [yet] complete enough to gather in all the major points of the essay” (Source: Strunk & White, *Elements of Style*).
 - B. Provide a future projection or final thought.
 - C. Give your ending emotional appeal.
 - D. Bring the paper “full circle” (reconnect to tone or content of introduction)

Worksheet for Expository Research

Assigned Topic: _____

Refined Topic/working thesis: _____

Problem Statement: _____

Background information: _____

Chain of Reasoning (ideas that support & explain the working thesis, shown in a logical sequence):

Why this issue matters: _____
