

An Outline for an Academic Essay in History

The following number designations do NOT refer to paragraphs, but instead refer to sections of an essay. A section can hold more than one paragraph. That said, for short essays each section might only have one paragraph.

Each paragraph must begin with a topic sentence. That sentence explains the subject and argument of the paragraph and all the information in the paragraph should back up that sentence.

1. Introduction – In this section you must introduce your topic and explain to the reader why it is important. This should be done in relatively general terms, meaning you probably shouldn't refer to specific authors or pieces of information. **WARNING:** Although your introduction should be general, it should also be on topic. Any essay that starts with the statement "Since the beginning of time..." is way too general. The last sentence of this section should probably be your thesis statement.
2. Context – Many people consider this a part of the introduction. In this section you want to give some specifics about your topic and contextualize your argument within a historical period or a debate within a social science. This section should explain, for example, how all of your sources relate to each other. Sometimes your thesis statement can come at the end of this section.
3. Evidence – Here you have a number of sections/paragraphs. Each paragraph should explain ONE point and each paragraph should support your thesis in an obvious way. For example, if you are doing a historiographical paper then you would have a section/paragraph explaining the arguments of each author on the topic you are concerned with.
4. Discussion – Here you compare and contrast the information you have presented in your evidence section.
5. Conclusion – The first sentence of your conclusion should restate your thesis. The rest of the section should weigh up the information you presented and answer the research question that your thesis was based upon.