

Developing Body Paragraphs

THE BODY PARAGRAPH. The middle section, or body, of your essay develops and supports your thesis. The body paragraphs are like a cheeseburger. They are layered and build upon each ingredient to present the details that convince your audience that your thesis is reasonable. To do so, each body paragraph should be *unified, coherent, and well developed*.

- **Each body paragraph should be unified.** A paragraph has unity when every sentence relates directly to the main idea of the paragraph.
- **Each body paragraph should be coherent.** A paragraph is coherent if its sentences are smoothly and logically connected to one another.
- **Each body paragraph should be well developed.** A body paragraph is well developed if it contains the examples, evidence, and explanations readers need to understand its main idea.

Topic Sentence (reason)

Before Macduff's son is murdered, he proves himself to be an intelligent child through his understanding of worldly concepts.

Evidence

For example, when his mother tells him that his father is dead—though his father has only gone to England—the child knows his mother is lying. Confident that his mother would weep over his father's death, the child says to her, "If you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father" (IV.ii.66-68).

Explanation

Macduff's son has a mature understanding of both his parents' relationship and the ways of the world. He knows his mother loves his father, and so, would cry if his father should die. He also knows that if a woman does not cry when her husband dies, she likely has another man waiting for her.

Further Development: More Evidence & Explanation

In the same discussion, Macduff's son says that all the liars and swearers in the world will never be hanged because there are "liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang them" (IV.ii.61-63). The son clearly understands the corruption in the world and in human nature and that men are imperfect.

Concluding Sentence

These insights are rare for a ten- or eleven-year-old child, thus proving his intelligence.

Developing Body Paragraphs

Here's a step-by-step process for drafting a coherent, well-developed, traditional body paragraph that supports the thesis of an argumentative essay:

1. Write a **topic sentence** that lets your reader know what the purpose of this paragraph is. Here's the basic format that helps the reader follow your train of thought: *A key reason that (reference to your thesis) is that (reason to be addressed in this paragraph)*. Now, here's an example using this technique; my thesis is that capital punishment in Texas should be abolished: *First, capital punishment should not be used in Texas because there is always the possibility of executing an innocent person.*
2. Begin the **body** of the paragraph by introducing (in my example with the transition "For example") and by giving one piece of evidence (example, authority, statistics, analogy, hypothetical situation): *For example, in April 1999, Gerald Wilkins, who had served twelve years on death row in an Illinois prison, was found not guilty of the crime of which he was convicted because of new DNA evidence.*
3. If the evidence comes from an outside source, be sure to document it. Notice that in the following example, the source is cited in MLA parenthetical style:
For example, in April 1999 Gerald Wilkins, who had served 12 years on death row in an Illinois prison, was found not guilty of the crime he had been convicted of because of new DNA evidence (Wallace 12).
4. Since in an argument you need to convince your reader to agree with your thesis, be sure to explain how the evidence supports the topic sentence, possibly like this: *If Mr. Wilkins's sentence—death by lethal injection—had been carried out promptly, an innocent man would have died. Fortunately he was still waiting for his execution date, and this made it possible to partially correct the error of his conviction.*
5. Make the transition to the next piece of evidence: *But Gerald Wilkins's situation is not an isolated case.*
6. Give the next piece of evidence (example, authority, statistics, analogy, hypothetical situation)—see #2 above.
7. If the evidence comes from an outside source, be sure to document it—see #3 above.
8. Explain how the evidence supports the topic sentence—see #4 above.
9. Write a **concluding sentence**: *As long as Texas continues to sentence convicted people to death, there will always be the possibility of executing an innocent person.*

Here's the paragraph that results from the above process:

A key reason that capital punishment should not be used in Texas is because there is always the possibility of executing an innocent person. For example, in April 1999, Gerald Wilkins, who had served twelve years on death row in an Illinois prison, was found not guilty of the crime of which he was convicted because of new DNA evidence (Wallace 12). If Mr. Wilkins's sentence—death by lethal injection—had been carried out promptly, an innocent man would have died. Fortunately he was still waiting for his execution date, and this made it possible to partially correct the error of his conviction. But Gerald Wilkins's situation is not an isolated case. (Provide a transition, the next piece of evidence, and explanation here—see #2-4 above.) As long as Texas continues to sentence convicted people to death, there will always be the possibility of executing an innocent person.