

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Body Paragraphs

While most essays begin and end with specialized paragraphs designed to introduce and conclude the work, a paper's success depends on the quality of its "middle" portions, which are sometimes called "body paragraphs." Body paragraphs perform different functions within different kinds of essays, but should always contribute to the author's overall purpose by presenting specifics while remaining focused and organized.

Characteristics of Good Body Paragraphs

Topic Sentence

Most body paragraphs benefit from a **topic sentence**. For more information about topic sentences, see that Sam Houston Academic Success Center handout/tutorial.

Briefly, a topic sentence communicates the specific point of a paragraph. The following topic sentence (1) indicates that the topic for this entire paragraph will be acceptability and (2) connects the paragraph to the paper's thesis, which is that creamy peanut butter is better than crunchy.

Example: *Creamy peanut butter is also superior to crunchy peanut butter in the area of acceptability.*

Specifics

Provide details, specific evidence, etc. that explain your argument and support the topic sentence. For this paragraph, The author researched the issue of peanut butter acceptability. His second sentence might be:

Example: *As recently as 2009, Smith discovered that nearly a quarter of people who prefer creamy peanut butter will refuse to eat crunchy peanut butter (12).*

Analysis

Quotes and other specific information may require further explanation to communicate their utility. Here, the author might follow his paraphrase of the Smith study with an interpretation of it that supports his claim about acceptability:

Example: *This number is striking, especially when compared to the relatively low percentage of people who prefer crunchy and reject creamy (5%), and clearly demonstrates the degree to which crunchy peanut butter is considered unacceptable by those who prefer creamy.*

Elaboration

To thoroughly make the case, you may choose to provide even further analysis to complete a paragraph's message. However, it is important not to become redundant or tedious. The present author added:

Example: *Conversely, creamy peanut butter enjoys a high degree of acceptability among people who prefer crunchy.*

Summary

Before moving on to a subsequent paragraph, it may be useful to articulate one more time what the paragraph has accomplished. As with the topic sentence, a final sentence should provide an overview of the entire paragraph's purpose and its relationship to the thesis statement.

Example: *Consequently, Smith concludes "that [creamy] is the peanut butter more likely to transcend boundaries of personal taste" (65).*

Full example

Creamy peanut butter is also superior to crunchy peanut butter in the area of acceptability. As recently as 2009, Smith discovered that nearly a quarter of people who prefer creamy peanut butter will refuse to eat crunchy peanut butter (12). This number is striking, especially when compared to the relatively low percentage of people who prefer crunchy and reject creamy (5%), and clearly demonstrates the degree to which crunchy peanut butter is considered unacceptable by those who prefer creamy. Consequently, Smith concludes "that [creamy] is the peanut butter more likely to transcend boundaries of personal taste" (65). Creamy is thus more accepted than crunchy.

Notice that nothing in that paragraph is about matters unrelated to acceptability. The author does not talk about jelly or varieties of creamy peanut butter (e.g. natural or regular). The author simply states the idea, uses specifics to back it up, explains his research, and finds a new way to summarize the idea.