



English as a Second Language *Four-Paragraph Essay* *Writing Level VI*

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The **four-paragraph** essay is the format used in Writing VI for ESL courses. The organization of this essay is **based** on the types of organization covered in Writing VI:

Advantages and disadvantages Comparison and contrast
Cause and effect Pros and cons (argumentation)

The structure of the **four-paragraph** essay consists of an introductory paragraph (with thesis statement), two body **paragraphs**, and one concluding paragraph.

Introduction

- A. The first **paragraph** in a **four-paragraph** essay is the **introductory paragraph** or the introduction for the entire essay.
- B. In the first **paragraph**, the writer introduces the subject and purpose of the essay.
 - 1. The writer provides a clear thesis sentence which states the subject and the major points the writer wants the reader to know about the subject.
 - 2. Although the thesis sentence can be located anywhere within the first **paragraph**, it is **usually** the last sentence in the **introductory paragraph**.
 - 3. The points in the thesis sentence are stated clearly, not implied, suggested, or stated **vaguely** such as, "Being a full-time college student offers several **opportunities**," or "**Achieving** success has **many** steps."
 - 4. To be perfectly clear about the points of the subject, state at least two points. For advantages and **disadvantages**, state one major **advantage** and one **disadvantage**. For comparison and contrast, state the two subjects and one point of similarity and one point of difference. For cause and effect, state the major cause and one effect. For pros and con, state one argument for something, one argument against. **NOTE** : You may also be asked to write about only one of the elements in the contrasting pairs of organization. For instance, you could write only about two **advantages** or **about** two **disadvantages**. For comparison and contrast, you might focus on two points of differences. For pros and cons, **you** could list two reasons to support an argument or two reasons to defeat the argument.

EXAMPLES OF THESIS SENTENCES:

Advantages and disadvantages:

Owning your own home provides more privacy but requires an expensive **maintenance**.

While owning your own home provides equity for borrowing money, the owner must constantly invest in the home for repairs and **upkeep**.

NOTE (two advantages): Two advantages of owning a pet include **emotional health opportunities** and **playful relaxation**.

Comparison and contrast:

Both a two-year college and a four-year college require basic courses in writing, but a four-year college might offer a wider variety of writing courses.

NOTE (two contrasts): Two differences between living in the city and living in the suburb include traffic **congestion** and public school facilities.

Cause and Effect

The pollution of coastal waters with hospital waste has threatened the survival of many water animals.

NOTE (two causes): Money problems and age differences are two causes for the high divorce rate in America.

(two effects): Two effects of raising the minimum wage would be fewer jobs available and higher costs for employers.

Pros and cons

Most Americans may not **personally** support abortion rights, but many Americans do not believe they should force their views on others.

College students generally do not support a required course attendance policy, but teachers agree the policy is necessary to insure success.

NOTE: (two pros): The **national** speed limit should be raised to 80 mph to increase traffic flow **and** reduce **the** costs of **shipping** goods.

(two cons): The age for **drinking** should be lowered to eighteen because **that** age is the legal age to vote and because most teenagers begin **drinking** around eighteen.

5. The sentences before the thesis sentence **provide background information**, define terms, or catch the attention of the reader in order to lead into the thesis statement.
- C. The introductory **paragraph should gain the** reader's attention **and make** him want to read further. This method can **be achieved by** using amusing **anecdotes**, startling statistics, **explicit examples**, and **other techniques**.

II. Body

- A. Paragraphs two and three of a four-paragraph essay are the **body paragraphs**.
- B. Each paragraph **begins with a topic sentence**, one of the two points in the thesis sentence.
- C. Each topic sentence is followed by sentences that **develop the topic sentence**.
- D. Each paragraph must have **unity** (all sentences develop only the idea in the topic sentence), **coherence** (sentences are arranged in a logical sequence), and **cohesion** (sentences are linked by connector or transition words such as *first, most important, then, while, in contrast*).
- E. All body paragraphs (and all paragraphs within the essay) should contain around **5-8 sentences for sufficient development**.

III. Conclusion

- A. The **fourth and final paragraph** of the **four-paragraph** essay is the **concluding paragraph** or the conclusion to the essay.
 1. An effective conclusion lets **the** reader know **that all has been said about the** subject as stated in the thesis sentence.
 2. While **the conclusion can sum up** what **has been said** in **the** essay, it does not repeat the major points discussed.
- B. No new ideas should be introduced in the conclusion.
- C. The **conclusion** is very **important because** it is the last **chance** the writer has to convey his point.

IV. Things to Note

- A. All essays have titles.
 1. Titles should be short and concise and should indicate the subject and tone or attitude of the essay.
 2. Titles should not simply be the topic of the essay.
 3. When writing an essay about another writer's work, never use the author's title as yours.
 4. The first letter of all major words within the title is capitalized. The first letter of articles and prepositions are not capitalized unless they are the first word in the title.
 5. Do not use a complete sentence as a title unless it is very short, and do not capitalize all letters in the title.
 6. Punctuation is not used in titles; however, exclamation marks and question marks should be used when needed.

- B. All essays must have a thesis statement or sentence.
 - 1. It must be clearly stated in the introduction.
 - 2. It should indicate the subject and major points about the subject.
- C. A good **paragraph** should be between 5 to 8 sentences.
 - 1. All sentences must be related to the other sentences within the paragraph.
 - 2. Never have a one-sentence paragraph.
- D. Each body **paragraph** should contain one main idea and should support the thesis statement by using specific details.
- E. There should be smooth transition between ideas and paragraphs.
- F. All information in the **paragraph** must be relevant to the topic sentence and to the thesis statement.
- G. The conclusion should let the reader know that the essay has ended and that the author has no more to say about the subject.

V. Final Thoughts

- A. Not all essays and writings consist of four paragraphs. Longer essays may have shorter **paragraphs** as transitions and may even have two **paragraphs** for the introduction.
- B. The four-paragraph essay structure is a basic method of approaching any subject for writing. It is a method of thinking analyzing.
- C. The structure of **introduction**, **body** with development, and **conclusion** is the main structure of writing and thought in Western civilization. The structure appears in news articles, magazine essays, textbooks, public speeches, formal introductions, presentations, arguments, and even advertising. The length, purpose, and degree of complexity of each of the three parts vary, however, according to the message, the writer, the reader, and time and space limitations.

