

# How to Develop and Structure Body Paragraphs

A well-developed paragraph in the midst of an essay (after the introduction) will usually have at least these three parts:

**I. Topic Sentence**-- the first sentence of the paragraph (tells the reader what the paragraph will be about and relates back to the essay's thesis statement)

**II. Examples from the text**—quotes from or paraphrases of the reading/research  
These examples should be specific to support the topic sentence. Add a lead-in before a quote. These examples should also include a citation indicating source (ex: in MLA style, give the author's last name and the page # for prose or line number for poetry)

**III. Analysis/Discussion of the Example**: This section should be at least several sentences and should analyze the example (such as the quote) in a way that develops the paragraph's topic sentence and essay's thesis. Your analysis should answer questions such as-- What does the example given show/suggest? What is the significance of the example in relation to your thesis? For literary analysis essays, what literary device is the author using in the quote/paraphrase you gave, and how does that literary device emphasize a particular point?

## Example Paragraph

- **Essay's Thesis Statement**: Use of metaphor in Mary Oliver's poem "Wild Geese" creates a nature-based spirituality that reconsiders Christianity and suggests we can know the divine through positive interaction with nature.

### A paragraph from the essay:

**I. One religious concept she rejects is that of a harsh and self-sacrificing repentance.** **II.** Near the beginning of the poem, Oliver writes, "You do not have to walk on your knees/ for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting" (3-4). **III.** Here, the desert paired with the concept of "repenting" reminds the reader of biblical characters who roam the desert for religious soul-searching, and it rejects the traditional notion of repentance as something requiring physical hardship. In addition, by placing this image at the beginning of the poem, she emphasizes that the poem as a whole will express a worldview in contrast with some traditional and religious viewpoints.

**ALTERNATIVES**: Consider how to vary your paragraph structures. For example, you could have more than one brief quote with more than one point of analysis within the same body paragraph. In some cases, you may be able to have the analysis *before* a quote/paraphrase rather than after it. Etc.....You don't have to follow an exact formula for paragraph structure or structure all of your body paragraphs the same way.