

Three Steps to Good Structure

Three Steps to Good Structure

1. Create a thesis statement.
2. Develop and outline the argument of your paper.
3. When revising your paper ask yourself, “How does this paragraph help me prove my thesis?”

Step One: Writing a Thesis Statement

Think of your thesis statement as the goal of your paper.

Try to state the goal of your paper in a single sentence.

Here are some examples to help.

Example Thesis Statements

For an article review:

- *A thorough summary and evaluation of Dawkins' article demonstrates that Dawkins was successful in proving that the moon landings were not faked.*
 - This is a good, clear thesis statement and it also shows the two main components of the body of the paper: a summary and evaluation.

For a research paper:

- *The evidence clearly demonstrates that the moon landings were not faked.*

For a reflection or reaction paper:

- *These experiences have made a tremendous impact in both my spiritual and emotional life.*
 - This thesis statement also has built in structure. This statement dictates that there should be two main points to the paper: spiritual influence and emotional influence.

If you are having trouble with thesis statements, the OWC webpage has some great resources to help. They are available here: ([LU Online Writing Center Writing Aids](#)).

Step Two: Develop an Outline

Now that you have a thesis statement, you can begin to work on the outline.

Your thesis should shape the points of your outline. A few examples will help explain this.

A good outline should have a number of attributes:

- It should be logical.
- It should have symmetry.
- Every point and sub point should help prove the thesis.

What is a logical outline?

- Try to imagine that your outline represents the points you would like to make in a debate.
 - Example: *Thesis: The moon landings really happened.*
 - I. First argument: The moon rocks are different than anything on earth.
 - A. The Argument for: They are made out of elements that are not found on earth.
 - B. The Argument against: Conspiracy theorists say that they are meteors made to look like moon rocks.
 - C. The Rebuttal: That is unlikely because there are thousands of moon rocks and only a few hundred meteors have ever landed on the earth.
 - Second Argument: Neil Armstrong is a trustworthy eyewitness.
 - A. The Argument For: Everyone who knows Mr. Armstrong says he has good character.
 - B. The Argument Against: Armstrong lied because he was paid off by the government.
 - C. The Rebuttal: Armstrong's lifestyle never changed after the moon landing, so he probably was not paid off.

Sample Outlines: Article Review

Thesis: *A thorough summary and evaluation of Dawkins' article demonstrates that Dawkins was successful in proving that the moon landings were not faked.*

A poor outline for this thesis would look like this:

I. Dawkins' First Point

A. The evidence against the moon landings is shaky.

B. NASA has supplied good explanations to counter the conspiracy theories.

II. My Thoughts about the Article

IV. Weakness in the Article

Notice how the outline and thesis statement do not seem related. Now let's look at a better outline.

Sample Outlines: Article Review

Thesis: *A thorough summary and evaluation of Dawkins' article demonstrates that Dawkins was successful in proving that the moon landings were not faked.*

I. Introduction

II. Summary

A. Dawkins' first point.

B. His second point.

III. Evaluation

A. Strengths

B. Weaknesses

C. Successfulness of the Article (did he make his case?)

IV. Conclusion

- Notice how the outline has symmetry, it is logical, and every point helps support the thesis.

Sample Outlines: Argumentative

Thesis: *The evidence clearly demonstrates that the moon landings were not faked.*

- First, let's look at an example of poor structure:

I. Introduction

II. History of NASA

A. JFK's role

III. Neil Armstrong was an Eyewitness

IV. One can see the Lunar Lander with a Telescope

V. Conclusion

Notice how this outline is not logical, symmetrical, and does not always support the thesis (e.g. how does the history of NASA help prove the thesis?).

Sample Outlines: Argumentative

Thesis: *The evidence clearly demonstrates that the moon landings were not faked.*

- I. Introduction and Statement of the Problem
(Conspiracy theorists think the moon landings were faked).
- II. First argument for Fake Moon Landings
 - A. The argument of the conspiracy theorists
 - B. Dawkins' rebuttal
 - C. Possible objections
- III. Second Argument for Fake Moon Landings
 - A. The argument of the conspiracy theorists
 - B. Dawkins' rebuttal
 - C. Possible objections
- IV. Conclusion

Step Three: “How does this help me prove my thesis?”

This step is simple. As you revise your paper, when you finish reading a paragraph ask, “how does this help me prove my thesis?”

There two things to keep in mind here:

- 1. The paragraph might not be relevant to your thesis and you might have to make the painful decision to edit it out.
- 2. You might find out that a certain paragraph needs to be moved somewhere else so that it can be more effective in helping your prove your thesis. In other words, you should also look at how that paragraph relates to the other paragraphs around it.

Quick Tips for Developing Good Structure

If you're having trouble making an outline from a thesis statement, try incorporating numbers into your thesis statement. Like this:

- *There are three reasons to think that Jesus is the Son of God.*
- *There are two irrefutable arguments which show that higher taxes hurt the economy.*
- When you use numbers like this, the main points of your outline are already done!

An introduction is crucial to the structure of a good paper.

- This is for two reasons:
 - The introduction is a roadmap that lays out the rest of your paper.
 - The introduction states the goal of your paper in a thesis statement.