
Organizing Brief Essays

“If you would be a reader, read; if a writer, write.”
—Epictetus

CHAPTER OBJECTIVE

After completing the activities in this chapter, you will have a clear understanding of how to organize brief essays.

5.1 Moving from Single Paragraphs to Essays

Paragraphs form the body of many different kinds of writing, from essays to job applications. Some demands for writing require only a single stand-alone paragraph. An answer to a test question is often only a paragraph in length. To apply for a college program, you may have to write a statement of why you should be admitted to that particular program; the application may leave room to write only a single paragraph. Before studying how to write effective essays, take another moment to consider single, individual paragraphs.

Garden-variety paragraphs fill the spaces between introductions and conclusions in all kinds of writing, including essays. Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that identifies the main idea developed in the paragraph (e.g., The biggest crop in the Niagara peninsula is cut flowers). Next come the sentences that support the main idea (e.g., statistics showing the value of the major Niagara crops). Commonplace paragraphs often end with a concluding sentence that restates the point, if this will help the reader understand the main idea (e.g., When people think of Niagara, they think of grapevines and peach orchards, but flowers are the main source of farm incomes).

Not only is an essay longer than a single paragraph, an essay differs in another fundamental way. An essay always includes a thesis statement; an essay makes a contention. By

contrast, a garden-variety paragraph begins with a topic sentence that indicates only the main idea of the paragraph, which could be a contention or simply a statement of fact. “Nicknames should be abolished” makes an assertion, and could be the topic sentence of a paragraph or the thesis of an essay. “Our biggest crop in the Niagara peninsula is cut flowers” is a topic sentence that could begin a paragraph that simply states a fact.

Non-fiction writing varies from being quite objective—an incident report that tries to objectively describe a fight in a group home or an information summary of a larger document—to very subjective—an essay recommending that Canadian parents not spank their children.

You’ve looked at an outline of Donovan Cutler’s paragraph “Down-Home Cooking” (figure 1–1). It is organized just as readers expect:

- topic sentence,
- support sentences, and
- concluding sentence.

In chapter 2, you studied how to create theses and support sentences. You studied how to write concluding sentences in section 4.6. It’s time to practise organizing all this information into well-formed essays.

You may recall that a paragraph can be more complex, such as the paragraph “How to Enjoy a Blizzard” (figure B–4). As you reread that paragraph, search for the three main points that support the topic sentence (you can enjoy a blizzard) and note the way each main point is supported by additional detail. Take another look at figure B–3, the outline for the paragraph about enjoying a blizzard. Imagine that you were going to write a humorous article for a college newspaper. Brainstorm additional points you could make for your plan to enjoy a blizzard. At a point, you may decide that the amount of support you’ve created is just too much to fit into a single paragraph. The increasing number of main points or the greater amount of supporting detail means that you can create a paragraph for each main point. Perhaps you’ll write a longer introduction and a lengthier conclusion.

It’s time to organize a longer document, a multi-paragraph essay. Figure 1–6 shows an outline for such an essay, a five-paragraph essay. Does your longer essay have to be five paragraphs? No, your essay need only be long enough to effectively make your point, and that could make it 10, 12, or 4 paragraphs long.

The fundamental structure of a multi-paragraph essay is similar to the organization of a complex paragraph:

- the thesis is stated (it replaces the topic sentence of the complex paragraph);
- each main point is successively made and supported; and,
- the conclusion reminds readers of the main idea.

Test your understanding of the components of a multi-paragraph essay by completing Activity 5–1.

▶ ACTIVITY 5–1* IDENTIFYING THE COMPONENTS OF BRIEF ESSAYS

Review the balloon version of “Pancakes for Sunday Brunch” (figure B–5). Then use the labels from figure 1–6, “Outline of a Five-Paragraph Essay” (i.e., introductory paragraph, first support paragraph, second support paragraph, third support paragraph, and concluding paragraph), to make a balloon version of “Make That a Veggie Burger.”

Make That a Veggie Burger

The rapid expansion of vegetarian items on menus across Canada is a sign that more people are choosing to become vegetarians. People still eating other animals always ask, “Why did you become a vegetarian?” Many vegetarians hope that as they explain why they chose vegetarianism, the questioner will choose vegetarianism, too. Become a vegetarian for three reasons: it is good for your health, environment, and conscience.

For some, choosing a healthy diet means becoming a vegetarian. Eating less fat—particularly animal fat—reduces the likelihood of developing cancer and heart disease. Dean Ornish, a physician and professor of medicine, recommends a low-fat diet that eliminates meat and dairy products. His studies suggest that this diet can even reverse some symptoms of heart disease. Choose vegetarianism for a lifestyle that leads to better health.

The destruction of the rain forests to clear grazing land for beef cattle has led some people to vegetarianism: They want to tread more lightly on the earth, to treat the environment more gently. Others are disturbed to read about how cattle manure runs off the ground and pollutes streams and groundwater. Far more land is needed to feed people meat than to produce enough grains, vegetables, and fruits to sustain human life. If you care about the environment, choose to be a vegetarian: it is an important way to care for our planet.

Some people become vegetarians because they can’t in good conscience kill other animals. If animals have enough consciousness to know their interests—such as preferring to stay alive—their wishes must be considered. Look at the way we resolve conflicts of interest with other conscious animals: humans. You want to drink alcohol and drive your car. I’m worried you’ll hurt me by driving drunk. We consider both interests and decide a limit to the alcohol permitted in the bloodstream. You can still have a beer after work, but I don’t have to worry that you’ll be driving while impaired. If you have decided to respect the interests of non-human animals, choose to become a vegetarian.

More and more people are becoming vegetarians. If you care about your health, your environment, and your conscience, choose vegetarianism.

ACTIVITY 5-2 IDENTIFYING THE COMPONENTS OF BRIEF ESSAYS

After referring to figure 1-6, create a similar outline for Sean Davidson's "Bar People."

Bar People

Ask the servers in a busy nightclub, and they will tell you they've seen it all. Bar patrons are a very diverse group, ranging from minors, to couples, to hard-core drinkers.

It is impossible, unfortunately, to eliminate minors from the bar scene. Whether through fake IDs or incompetent doorkeepers, minors manage to sneak in. From a server's point of view, these are the worst customers: They tip poorly, if at all. Because they cannot handle their alcohol, minors often instigate arguments and fights. Until someone comes up with a fool-proof way to determine age, minors will continue to make life interesting for servers.

Couples are generally the most pleasant people to serve. They are too wrapped up in each other to create problems in the bar. In order to impress their dates, people on dates tip well and drink less. Couples are almost perfect customers unless they do become intoxicated and overly amorous for a public place.

It's hard to rate heavy drinkers as customers. They can go from being your best customers of the night to your worst. They generally tip well early in the evening, but as the money runs low, the next beer is more important than leaving a tip. Hard-core drinkers can be selfish and inconsiderate about leaving the bar: They don't care that the server of alcohol can be held responsible for any accidents caused by a drunk patron. Although a server stands to make a lot of money from these customers, they pose a great risk and can be very unpleasant when refused service.

Minors, couples, and hard-core drinkers all make life interesting for a server in a bar. They're why I'd rather sell drinks than shoes or stereos.

Once you've memorized the main elements of brief essays, and the order of those components, turn your attention to studying the introductory, support, and concluding paragraphs.

5.2 The Unique Structure of Introductory Paragraphs

Take a closer look at introductory paragraphs. Look again at figure 1-6, the outline of a five-paragraph essay; look particularly at Paragraph 1: Introductory Paragraph. Examine the elements readers expect in the essay's introduction and the order they expect to encounter these elements: lead-in, thesis, and—usually—a preview of the main points. Read this section to learn more about organizing powerful introductions to your essays.

Lead-ins

Your readers begin to *judge you* as soon as their eyes focus on your writing. You create a document with an attractive appearance because you want your readers to form a favourable first impression. Your efforts to make a good impression should include creating a strong lead-in. Other writers call this a *grabber* (Green and Norton), a *motivator* (Bailey and Powell), or a *hook* (Wingersky, Boerner, Holguin-Balogh, Gossin, and Stancer), but all these terms express a similar underlying belief: You have only a few moments to capture the attention of your reader and to arouse a desire to read your document.

Most of the time, you will not worry about writing an effective lead-in until you've generated a thesis, main points, and support and have outlined your essay. Then, you'll want to pay particular attention to the beginning.

Look to the content of your document to create the lead-in, the first words your audience will read. As you re-familiarize yourself with your content, be on the lookout for information that would capture your readers' interest. Here are some ways writers often lead readers into documents.

Telling a story makes a good lead-in. Contrast these two ways of introducing the same essay.

OK: Using cosmetic surgery to disguise the appearance of children with Down's syndrome does not increase their IQ, achievement test scores, or school grades.

BETTER: All through my pregnancy, I dreamed of my baby. When—after 17 hours of labour—I gazed into her face, my dreams for her were shattered as I realized she had Down's syndrome. I wondered if the cosmetic surgery they were using in Germany to disguise this condition would help my beautiful baby be more successful at school. Right then I planned to research the topic. I found out that such cosmetic surgery did not increase IQ, achievement test scores, or school grades.

Sometimes an anecdote or a case study can make a powerful lead-in to an essay.

Making a startling statement can be a good lead-in. "Working shifts can ruin your marriage." That really catches the reader's attention. Your reader isn't expecting such a claim, and he or she is therefore motivated to read the rest of the essay.

You can also startle readers into attention by asserting an unexpected point of view. Here's an example: "Most people think that attending daycare strains the emotional bond between children and their parents, but such child care actually promotes better parent-child bonding." An opinion startlingly different from popular belief will spark interest.

An apt quotation is a good lead-in. A Goderich, Ontario, judge—in dismissing charges against a mother who had punished her 11-year-old daughter for messing her room and blaming her sister—said, “Parents are entitled to use a belt . . . There were welts, but I guess you expect to find welts when you use a belt” (Jourard).

That quotation is a strong lead-in to an essay opposing spanking. It is powerful because it has the immediacy of speech, and it hints at a story. Quotations can do that.

“The state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation,” said former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in an interview in December 1967. His statement has served as a lead-in for many essays.

Your dictionary is another effective source of material to quote. Quoting a definition can sometimes grab the attention of readers. “Blood money: Money gained at the cost of another person’s life, freedom, welfare” was the lead-in to Toronto health policy consultant Michael Rachlis’ essay decrying a tax cut financed by reducing welfare payments. That quotation really grabs your attention, even if you disagree with Rachlis’ opinion.

A question can make an interesting lead-in. Consider this essay lead-in: “Would you like to babysit 70 children for 45 minutes? Would you like to do that with your back to the children? How would you like to do it while driving a 40-foot school bus?”

Jill Pamenter hooks her audience by asking those questions. Her questions make her readers concerned about children’s safety. The questions help Jill persuade readers to support her quest to ensure that school buses are staffed with two adults: a driver and a monitor.

Questioning is a powerful way to pull a response from your readers. It can really grab their attention and motivate their desire to find out what you have to say.

▶ ACTIVITY 5-3 CREATING LEAD-INS FOR ESSAYS

Create a lead-in for each of the incomplete introductory paragraphs. Read through the thesis statement and the preview of the main points. Write a lead-in with a tone appropriate to the topic.

1.* _____

_____ I decided to quit my job at a local sawmill, and come back to college, because management frequently assigned unscheduled overtime, always paid low wages, and often ignored safety regulations. (Thanks to Chris Barr.)

2. _____

_____ Even in cars equipped with air bags, you should still wear your seat belt because you can avoid the neck and spinal-column injuries possible even at low speeds and the fatal injuries possible in high-speed crashes. (Thanks to Greg Henderson.)

3. _____

_____ To be a successful film actor, you need to know exactly what to do when you hear the words "Rolling," "Speed," and "Action." (Thanks to Michael D. White.)

4. _____

_____ If you want to avoid the drunks you sometimes run into at parties, pay close attention to the way someone approaching you walks and talks. (Thanks to Aaron Smallbone.)

5. _____

_____ Air bags in cars reduce neither accidents nor insurance costs. (Thanks to Andrew MacLeod.)

Thesis and Preview of Main Points

Once you've created a lead-in for your essay's introduction, it's time to state your thesis, and this almost always means simultaneously previewing your main points.

Usually you include the thesis and the preview of the main points in the same sentence. Express the main points in a parallel form. Look at these examples:

POOR: You'll have a wonderful time at Point Pelee Provincial Park swimming, birding, and to go for hikes.

GOOD: University College of the Cariboo is a good place to study biology, chemistry, or mathematics.

The second sentence is better because the words in the series are expressed in a parallel structure that reads more smoothly. Read more about parallel structure in chapter 11, section 11.14.

5.3 Organize the Support Paragraphs

Within each paragraph, you organized your points of support chronologically, emphatically, logically, or randomly. Remember the discussion in which the class determined the order for discussing the main effects of using photo radar to enforce speed limits? Follow the same procedure as you organize the main points of your essay. After you arrange your main points in the optimal order, use the same order when you preview those main points in your introductory paragraph. Your readers will expect you to use the same order in both parts of the essay. Indeed, readers will often glance back to the preview section of your introduction to see which point you will make next. You make your essay more coherent when you ensure the same order for the main points in the preview and in the essay's body; all the information is more tightly tied together.

BOX 5-1 Ensure Coherence between Paragraphs

When you tightly connect all the paragraphs of your essay, you make it easier for your readers to understand you. You achieve that coherence partly by organizing well-formed essays with introductions, support, and conclusions. You create outlines—outlines of the content, as shown in figures 1-7 and 2-4, and outlines of content and organization, as shown in figure B-7—to write essays with strong cohesion.

You can employ another technique to create cohesion: Use transition words.

***Create coherence by using transition words.** In figure 1-6, “Outline of a Five-Paragraph Essay,” you can see the words *with transition* in parentheses at the beginning of paragraphs 3 and 4. These are logical points in five-paragraph essays where you can ensure your readers see the relationship of a previously mentioned point with the point you make next. You can begin your topic sentence by briefly repeating the point you just made in the previous paragraph.

Look at these two versions of a middle section of a five-paragraph essay. Notice how the second version has transition in the topic sentence.

NO TRANSITION:

One act of cheating can have devastating effects on a student's reputation and finances.

Plagiarism also hurts the community.

TRANSITION:

One act of cheating can have devastating effects on a student's reputation and finances.

Not only does plagiarism hurt the individual, it also harms the community.

Test your understanding of how to create transition by completing Activity 5-4.

▶ ACTIVITY 5-4* CREATING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

Read this portion of "Shamrock Club Boxers," and rewrite it to create more cohesion between the paragraphs by adding a reminder of the previous point to the topic sentences for the paragraphs about casual participants and boneheads:

They work hard and have a strong desire to win their bouts. These top competitors live totally healthy lifestyles.

Some of the fighters at the Shamrock Club participate more casually. These boxers don't have the same dedication as the first type. Boxing is only a secondary activity in their lives. They do the work at a slower pace and don't get the same attention from the coaches. Casual participants don't usually choose as healthy a lifestyle.

The third type of fighters are boneheads.

▶ ACTIVITY 5-5 CREATING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS

Read Theresa Duff's essay "Sign Language in School," and create more cohesion between the paragraphs by adding a reminder of the previous point to the topic sentence about the next point.

Sign Language in School

Imagine never being able to hear anything around you. Worse, imagine that you couldn't talk with the people in your life. High schools should offer courses in American Sign Language—just as they offer courses in other languages—because many students are interested in learning Sign to benefit themselves and deaf people.

Many high school students are more interested in learning sign language than French, Spanish, German, or Latin. One of the goals of second-language learning is to develop the intelligence of the language learner, and students know that learning Sign would be just as stimulating as learning a spoken language. Some students would also like to learn Sign because it would enable them to become more rounded people by making it easier to communicate with a greater diversity of humankind, just as learning any other second language. Many students, who must now wait until college, are interested in learning to sign while at high school.

_____ it could also financially benefit the learners. Potential employers might be impressed by job applicants who know Sign. Deaf people shop, too, and a company or store with employees who can communicate with deaf customers could attract more business. And, of course, there are jobs for interpreters and other kinds of workers in schools, service agencies, and group homes.

_____ it would be a great benefit to our deaf citizens. It is very hard for people born deaf to learn to communicate by speech and to lip-read. It is considerably easier for people who can hear to learn sign language. If more students could learn Sign while at high school, it would enrich them and improve the lives of deaf people in our community.

High schools should offer courses in sign language because many students want to learn to sign; they know that it would be interesting and would be valuable to themselves and to deaf people.

5.4 The Unique Structure of Concluding Paragraphs

After you have created the content for an essay and outlined your plan of development, turn your attention to your ending. Partings leave impressions that are nearly as important as introductions, so you want to write a strong concluding paragraph.

Look again at figure 1–6, the outline of a five-paragraph essay. Read about the elements of the final paragraph. What are the two parts of a concluding paragraph? You're right: a restatement or recap of the thesis—usually the main points, too—and a clincher.

Restatement of the Thesis

The restatement of the thesis gives the writer one last opportunity to remind the reader of the contention in the writing. It's your last chance to ensure your reader *gets* the point. You don't want to sound repetitious, so create new ways to express the main ideas. Sometimes those synonyms you used to create greater coherence can be used here too. At other times, you can summarize or reinforce your point more forcefully by repeating the words in your introductory paragraph.

Look again at “The Positive Effects of Using Photo Radar to Enforce Speed Limits” (figure B–8). In this instance, the writer simply repeated the thesis and main points.

The Clincher

Writers often choose to finish an essay with some final comment created to linger in the mind of the reader and to leave the reader with a good final impression. Here are two suggestions for creating good clinchers.

If your topic is not too serious, you can finish with a humorous comment. Some essays finish with a humorous point, like the clincher for “The Positive Effects of Using Photo Radar to Enforce Speed Limits” (figure B–8). It reminds us that we might end up in a photo radar photograph any time we are in a car, so we might want to stay home on a bad-hair day. The essay closes with the words “Oh, well, you can always wear a hat.”

If your essay has a serious tone, write a clincher that will make a final sober comment. The essay about plagiarism is quite sombre in tone (see section 7.3 in chapter 7). This sort of sober-minded advice seems a good parting comment:

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but when you want to borrow other people's ideas, give them credit by naming the authors and indicating where their work was published.

▶ ACTIVITY 5–6* WRITING CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Imagine the essays that might be written from the following decimal outlines. For each, write a concluding paragraph that includes a recap of the thesis (and main points) and a clincher.

1. Thesis: There are several benefits to learning to play a musical instrument.
 1. People who learn to play a guitar, piano, or band instrument will find that their skill always makes it easier to meet new friends.
 2. Learning to play an instrument to accompany oneself while singing provides the musician with an enjoyable hobby.
 3. Putting your brain through the work of learning to play music can actually make you smarter.

2. Thesis: Taking our children along on routine trips to do chores may be a little more work than going alone, but it benefits our kids.
 1. The conversations we have at the supermarket or garage—and the people we meet who also talk with our children—help our children develop better language skills.
 2. While bakeries and hardware stores are old hat to us, our children learn more about their world whenever they visit these places with us.
 3. The give-and-take of getting along with other people when we share outings helps our children develop more social skills.
3. Thesis: Lennie Gallant is a fine singer-songwriter.
 1. Gallant's distinctive voice draws you into his songs.
 2. When you listen to Lennie Gallant's story-songs, you sometimes feel as though you know the people he sings about.
 3. Gallant, a PEI native, has a talent for telling Canadians stories about themselves.
4. Thesis: It's a good practice to write routine classroom assignments in MLA style.
 1. Most teachers will form a positive impression of a paper formatted in MLA style.
 2. When you routinize the formatting of your assignments, you save time.
 3. Writing in MLA style is a courtesy that helps the reader; for example, teachers can quickly find the information they need to record a mark for the writer.
5. Thesis: There are many reasons why we should make it financially easier for students to attend college.
 1. To succeed in the global economy, Canada will need highly educated citizens, and more capable people would attend college if we removed economic barriers.
 2. A democracy works better when citizens are more informed, and a college education helps students become more knowledgeable about the world.
 3. Students would learn more effectively if they were not preoccupied with money.

▶ ACTIVITY 5-7 WRITING CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Imagine the essays that might be written from the following decimal outlines. For each, write a concluding paragraph that includes a recap of the thesis (and main points) and a clincher.

1. Thesis: Several factors make it difficult to quit smoking.
 1. It's tough to quit smoking cigarettes when you constantly see other people puffing away in the doorways of every building you enter.
 2. Peers who smoke make it hard to quit because they often urge you to join them for a smoke.
 3. Memories of how much you enjoyed smoking can tempt you to light up again.
2. Thesis: If you visit Niagara Falls, there are three attractions you must see.

1. Journey Behind the Falls—tunnels you can look out of right into the falling water—is one of the best attractions in Niagara Falls.
2. Another must-see is the Imax film *Niagara: Miracles, Myth, and Magic*.
3. The best thrill in Niagara Falls—short of going over in a barrel—is riding the Maid of the Mist ferryboat right up to the face of the falls.
3. Thesis: The Lung Association deserves your support.
 1. Your donations will help the Lung Association fund medical research into lung disease.
 2. The Lung Association offers educational programs to help asthmatic children and adults suffering from chronic lung diseases such as emphysema.
 3. You should donate to the Lung Association to support its stop-smoking programs.
4. Thesis: There are three ways we can help children learn to read words automatically.
 1. To help children learn to read independently, we should encourage young children to read easy text and guess at the words they cannot yet read.
 2. If we teach children how to do phonic analysis, they will have a procedure to try when they don't recognize words.
 3. When we quietly tell a child a word she doesn't recognize while reading aloud, we help the child learn to recognize it automatically.
5. Thesis: Students need to consider three factors to find a great place to live while attending college.
 1. Students need to investigate several places to find a home that meets their first requirement: low cost.
 2. Most students also need to consider location in looking for a place to live while at school because they can save a lot of money if they can walk to school.
 3. Good atmosphere is also important to students because they spend a lot of hours at home.

5.5 Putting It All Together to Write Brief Essays

You can take certain actions at the beginning of your composition course that will maximize your writing's improvement. Look closely at your course outline. Determine if you can choose topics for your essays. Then, plan the essays you're going to write. Perhaps you would like to write about topics related to your program. Perhaps there are social issues that concern you. To prepare to write meaningfully about these topics, you may want to do some research. You might research casually by reading sections of a textbook, or you may go to a library and use information-retrieval tools to research a topic.

As you imagine your audience, you'll know whether you need to learn more to write your essay.

This approach is obviously more work than just writing off the top of your head. Everyone finds it easier to write about what he or she knows well and harder to write about topics with more sophisticated content. Analyzing your college's policy for appealing a course grade is harder than composing a humorous essay about how you got your family to fire you from dishwashing chores. Yet, the writing you will do in the workplace is more like that essay about appealing a grade. Some of the sample essays in chapter 7 were written by students after they did some research.

Chapters 6 and 7 present essays with various numbers of paragraphs to help you understand essay writing. To do so, you've got to adjust your essays to the length you need, which could be four, six, or sixty paragraphs. That's also why you'll be asked to make outlines or balloon versions of essays. When you can create an appropriate outline to help you construct an essay, you've developed a very useful writing skill.

As you get ready to hand in a writing assignment, take a moment to consider why your teacher is going to mark it. The first reason is obvious: To earn a paycheck, the teacher must submit grades for each student. Teachers of writing, however, usually have nobler reasons for marking your papers: They sincerely want to help you write better. They believe that students are empowered when they become capable writers. Scratch an English teacher, and you'll usually find someone who passionately wants to help all students be the best they can be. So, your teacher will write feedback on your assignment to help you improve as a writer.

This feedback really can help you transform yourself into a more capable writer. You can begin to make the most of this feedback even before you hand in your assignment. Apply everything you know about writing so that your document is as good as you can make it. That way, the feedback will indicate precisely what you *still* need to learn to improve. You can get down to the business of self-improvement as a writer.

You may find it helpful when planning an essay to create a scratch outline. Figure 2-4 shows a scratch outline of the content of the pancake brunch essay. Figure 1-6, "Outline of a Five-Paragraph Essay," outlines both the content and organization of a brief essay. Remember: You create an outline to help you write a better essay, so your outline need only be sufficiently detailed to help you write faster and better. Figure 5-1 shows an even simpler scratch outline of an essay's content. When planning your essay, you might save time by jotting your ideas into a copy of the outline below. (If your essay makes more than three main points, you will have to add to this scratch outline.)

Create your outline as you plan your essay. You may find that to write an effective essay you need to create a scratch outline of the content but need only refer to the outline of the content and organization.

After you've completed a draft, use the checklist to be sure your essay is sound. Test your essay to see if you can give a yes to every question (figure 5-2).

FIGURE 5-1
Scratch Outline of an Essay

Thesis:

First Main Point:

Point-form notes of specific support for the first main point

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Second Main Point:

Point-form notes for the second main point

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Third Main Point:

Point-form notes for the third main point

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

FIGURE 5-2

Checklist for Brief Essays

Introductory Paragraph

- Did I begin with a strong lead-in?
- Did I state my thesis?
- Did I preview my main points?

Support Paragraphs

Paragraph developing the first main point

- Did I begin my first support paragraph with a topic sentence about the first point I previewed in the thesis sentence?
- Did I detail convincing support for the first main point?
- Did I effectively conclude the paragraph?

Paragraph developing the second main point

- Did I begin my second support paragraph with a topic sentence about the second point I previewed in the thesis sentence?
- Did I detail convincing support for the second main point?
- Did I effectively conclude the paragraph?

Paragraph developing the third main point

- Did I begin my third support paragraph with a topic sentence about the third point I previewed in the thesis sentence?
- Did I detail convincing support for the third main point?
- Did I effectively conclude the paragraph?

Concluding Paragraph

- Did I recap my thesis and main points?
- Did I finish with a strong clincher?

Whole-document concerns

- Did I consider my audience's need for information?
- Did I stay on topic?
- Did I organize my points effectively?
- Did I maintain appropriate tone?
- Did I write coherently?
- Did I make sense?
- Did I eliminate any redundancy?
- Did I proofread carefully to spell and punctuate correctly?
- Did I create an appropriate appearance for my document?

5.6 Some Concluding Thoughts

If you follow the advice and do the activities in this chapter, you will improve your writing. You can also make progress by reading the sample essays and working through the analysis questions about them (see chapters 6 and 7). In part 5, you can study how published writers developed their ideas. Still, there's only so much progress that comes from studying and completing exercises. The more often you write *entire* essays, the faster you will learn to write better.