



TEMPLATE FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS

The light-bulb clicked on while I was revising a paper for an English Literature class. I was making a case for why computer programming is not a good medium for creating Medieval poetry even though the type-scenes, stock characters, and rhetorical descriptions are prime candidates for automation. While consulting with a peer on how to organize my ideas, I realized that a long paper is a series of small papers threaded together with a thesis statement. In other words, it's a five-paragraph essay on steroids.

Let me explain.

The overall structure of a typical paper is:

- ◆ Introduction (with thesis)
- ◆ Supporting point 1
- ◆ Supporting point 2
- ◆ Supporting point 3
- ◆ Conclusion

Pretty standard, right? Here is my “ah-ha” moment: if I think about each of the supporting points as a mini-essay, I can talk about complex ideas in an organized format.

The structure becomes:

- ◆ Introduction (with main thesis integrating mini-theses #1, #2, and #3)
 - Supporting point 1 (mini-essay 1)
 - Mini-introduction (with mini-thesis #1 supporting the main thesis)
 - Supporting point A for supporting point 1
 - Supporting point B for supporting point 1



- Supporting point C for supporting point 1
- Mini-conclusion for mini-thesis #1
- Supporting point 2 (mini-essay 2) ...
- Supporting point 3 (mini-essay 3) ...
- ◆ Conclusion (threading everything back together with the main thesis)

Does that make sense? All the mini-theses have their own support while they are supporting a bigger idea. An even bigger paper, like a thesis or dissertation, could incorporate several of these types of papers. Ad infinitum! And because recursion is awesome, I also think about each paragraph as a teeny-tiny essay with the topic sentence serving as the thesis statement.

Since learning this organization technique, I have improved my writing process. Using this template as an outline allows me to connect ideas before I flesh out the details. By organizing ideas first, I reduce the time spent on the revision process. And for the record, I received a 4.0 on my Medieval Literature term paper.

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