

## How to Write an Essay or Research Paper in the Social Sciences (the basics)

In social science, most of your writing will be spent on essays or research, gathering evidence to make a strong case for something. Often, you will be required to write essays involving a *thesis* statement. A thesis statement is the central point of your paper: this is the thing that you are trying to prove. The thesis is supported by *arguments*: this is where you will gather evidence and provide reasoning to prove the point you are trying to make.

A social science paper typically contains three sections: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Throughout the paper, it should be clear what your thesis is, and each of these three sections is an opportunity to communicate it clearly and concisely to your audience. Remember: “Tell them what you’re going to say, say it, and tell them what you said.”

### **The introduction: “Tell them what you’re going to say”**

The introduction is where you introduce your audience to the topic of your paper, the arguments you plan to make, and your thesis. It tells the audience exactly what to expect from the rest of the paper. Although writing an introduction can be challenging, it is also a useful tool for you as a writer. By laying out your arguments in the introduction, you can then use it as a general outline for the rest of your paper. A good introduction allows your paper to feel clean, clear, and well-organised.

### **The body: “Say it”**

The body is where you make your arguments. This is where you present evidence, whether simply sharing your own reflections or paraphrasing another scholar’s work (which you must always be sure to properly cite). Often it is best to present three arguments, but there is no hard-and-fast rule. Three arguments does *not* necessarily mean three paragraphs, but usually means three sections with as many paragraphs as necessary. The number of paragraphs to be used depends on the requirements of the assignment, but each paragraph should communicate a clear message on its own.

## **The conclusion: “Tell them what you said”**

The conclusion is like the introduction inverted: it is an opportunity to remind the audience of your thesis and arguments. However, the conclusion also serves as an opportunity to discuss the significance of your paper. This is where you might answer questions like “so what?” or “why does any of this matter?” You may choose to reflect on how this topic connects to larger social issues or discuss potential areas of future research. The important thing is to leave your audience knowing clearly what your point was and why your message was important.