Packing a Punch: Developing Well-Supported Body Paragraphs

A Chandler-Gilbert Community College Workshop Presentation
What kinds of writing assignments need well-supported and developed ideas?
What kinds of writing assignments need well-supported and developed ideas?

• All kinds: narrative, descriptive, reading-response, research, persuasive, etc.

• Even writing outside of the classroom like résumés or letters to the editor will be more successful if they’re fully developed.

How you support or develop your ideas from one writing project to another may differ, but it’s always important!
Why is it important to write body paragraphs that provide well-developed and supported ideas?
Why is it important to write body paragraphs that provide well-developed and supported ideas?

To deliver a knock-out punch in your paper!

• Strong support helps convince your reader that you understand and are well-informed about your topic.

• Specific and detailed writing helps you SHOW the reader your idea, not simply TELL him or her.

• Thorough development helps persuade your reader that your perspective is worth considering.

(Designing the Essay 7; Gocsik, “Considering Structure”)
So, how do we write a developed, well-supported, knock-out paragraph?

It’s as easy as PIE!

Point
Illustration
Explanation

(Designing the Essay 8; Weida and Stolley)
Let’s get baking!

Imagine we’re writing an essay with the following thesis:

*Students who take advantage of Writing Center resources position themselves for greater success after college.*
Before developing each idea in your paper, you need to clarify your **POINT**; in other words, provide a **TOPIC SENTENCE**.

Imagine this **point** or **topic sentence** as the pie crust, providing the foundation on which to build and defining the boundaries within which to discuss your idea.

*(Designing the Essay 8; Driscoll and Brizee; Gocsik, “Considering Structure”)*
POSSIBLE POINTS

Think of your point or topic sentence as a mini-thesis. It could be a claim or an assertion:

- of fact or definition
- of cause and effect
- about worth or value
- about possible solutions or policies

(Weida and Stolley)
Practicing PIE

Students should require themselves to visit their campus Writing Center (WC) during their first semester of college.
Next, **ILLUSTRATE** the point by providing **EVIDENCE**, such as facts, examples, research, statistics, etc., that will strengthen the claim in your topic sentence.

The **evidence** you use to **illustrate** your point is like the fruit in the pie, providing a lot of the substance and supporting the top crust (the point).

*(Designing the Essay 8; Gocsik, “Considering Structure”)*
TYPES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

First hand or primary sources
- Research you conduct, including interviews, surveys, experiments
- Personal experience or stories

Possible primary illustrations: quotations, anecdotes, data, results

Second hand or secondary sources
- Others’ research, including books, periodicals, websites

Possible secondary illustrations: testimony, quotations, paraphrases, statistics, definitions, data, timeline

(Driscoll and Brizee; Weida and Stolley)
In your PIE, make sure the “fruit” is ripe and used in the right quantity.

• Unripe fruit is like incomplete evidence that may raise more questions rather than provide proof.

• Too much fruit or evidence may overwhelm the reader and make it difficult to keep your piece together. Since this is YOUR paper, your writing should not be lost in information and arguments of others.

• Too little fruit or evidence may cause the crust to collapse. If the evidence is too minimal to support the point and/or you rely too heavily on your own explanatory arguments, you may need additional research.

(Gocsik, “Considering Structure”; “Logic”)
Students should require themselves to visit their campus Writing Center (WC) during their first semester of college. According to Barbara Gordon’s study, which surveyed students whose professors required them to seek WC tutoring, a majority expressed appreciation for the requirement. Even though 69 percent were frustrated or indifferent about the requirement prior to visiting, 91 percent indicated some likelihood of returning voluntarily after visiting. Furthermore, 81 percent felt that WC visits should be mandatory for all first-year students (Gordon 155-157).
Finally, clearly EXPLAIN WHY your illustrations connect to your point and HOW the evidence supports your topic sentence and your thesis, applying the illustration to PROVIDE YOUR OWN ORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE.

Your explanation is like the pie filling, the crucial ingredients that bind together the whole pie and help keep it whole, even when you’re only looking at one slice or bite.
Let’s spend a little more time on the explanation...

**POP QUIZ:**

I can assume that my reader will connect the dots between my examples and my topic sentence, so it is okay imply my meaning rather than writing it out.

TRUE or FALSE
POP QUIZ:

I can assume that my reader will connect the dots between my examples and my topic sentence, so it is okay imply my meaning rather than writing it out.

FALSE
Providing a thoughtful and clear explanation that connects your illustration to your point is critical to writing a strong paper and is part of your job as the writer.

If you do not take the effort to write out your thought-process, your reader may not make the connection or may come to a different conclusion.

(Designing the Essay 6; Weida and Stolley)
The explanation is your time to say something new and thought-provoking about your topic and to let your intelligence, experience, and logic shine!

**Be inventive**

*Use rhetorical strategies like logos, ethos, and pathos*

**Avoid logical fallacies**

*Consider an opposing viewpoint and how you might address it*

(Gocsik, “Logic”; Weida and Stolley)
Students should require themselves to visit their campus Writing Center (WC) during their first semester of college. According to Barbara Gordon’s study, which surveyed students whose professors required them to seek WC tutoring, a majority expressed appreciation for the requirement. Even though 69 percent were frustrated or indifferent about the requirement prior to visiting, 91 percent indicated some likelihood of returning voluntarily after visiting. Furthermore, 81 percent felt that WC visits should be mandatory for all first-year students (Gordon 155-157).

Gordon’s article cites earlier research, which also discovered a majority of students benefit from required tutoring sessions. However, the college experience is not only about education but also about maturing and developing a sense of personal responsibility. While following an instructor’s visitation requirement can help introduce a student to a valuable learning resource, students should take individual initiative and command of their educational journey by requiring themselves to seek tutoring on one of their first college writing assignments, whether they think they need help or not. Self-mandated WC tutoring sessions can help students develop lifelong skills of self-motivation and follow-through as well as of openness to seeking help and feedback.
Missing the Mark

Let’s look at a couple of weaker examples and discuss what’s wrong with these paragraphs.
What’s wrong with this paragraph?

Do you believe America is the greatest country in the world? I do. And I want to keep it that way. Supporting our schools is one of the most patriotic things we can do. I am old enough to remember the GI Bill, which provided college education for the WW2 veterans. The result was a well-educated work force that sent a man to the moon and created an economy that ruled the world for decades. The world today is more competitive than ever. Arizona is not only competing with China and India (which is educating twice as many college students as the United States), we are competing with every other state in the union for new business. And without new business, which brings jobs, Arizona will wither on the vine. So here’s the question: why would a big company with lots of good jobs move to a state that doesn’t support education? Why move to a place with a lousy workforce? New Jersey spends more than twice as much per child as Arizona. Even Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi, spend more per child. We simply must do a better job of educating our children, for Arizona’s future. This small tax is an investment in Arizona’s future – and America’s. Support our schools. It’s the patriotic thing to do. (AZ S.O.S. 14)
What’s wrong with this paragraph?

Vote “NO” More Taxes! Healthcare ... and education consume about 70% of Arizona’s General Fund, and billions more in federal and local taxes. U.S. spending in these areas greatly exceeds that of Japan and other competitors, yet brings inferior results. America spends 17.3% of GDP on healthcare vs. less than 9% for Japan. Studying others could bring much lower Arizona health care expenditures. America spends an estimated 5.7% of GDP on education vs. 3.6% for Japan. However, comparisons of pupil achievement repeatedly find Japanese and other high-school students substantially outscoring Americans. Inflation-adjusted per-pupil K-12 expenditures in America have increased to about 250% of 1970-71 levels and now total about $10,000/pupil in Arizona; meanwhile, little if any improvement has occurred in 17-year-olds’ national performance on the federal NAEP test. Arizona should reduce costs by cutting many teachers’ pay and benefits to levels comparable to most private school teachers, increasing class size to Japanese levels, allowing qualified 10th graders to enter college (planned by eight states), and reducing overheads (nearly half of staff). At the same time we can improve pupil outcomes by lengthening our school year from 180 days to Japan’s 240, increasing parental involvement, and substantially raising pupil expectations - while reducing costs to Japanese levels. Potential university savings include ceasing to pay professors for useless ‘research’ (99% of discoveries are made by 1% of researchers - Julius Axelrod, Nobel-prize winner), both increasing professors’ teaching workloads and reducing overhead staffing to former levels, teaching more high-school Advanced Placement classes, and cutting the almost half of admitted students that don’t graduate. Vote “NO” --> reform --> lower taxes and tuition, better results. (AZ S.O.S. 38)
Let’s spar with some paragraphs!
Works Cited


