

## Secret Revealed: The “Five Paragraph Essay”

[That's it??]

Template

The academic discipline of English is very heavily based on scholarly argumentative, thesis driven writing (as most disciplines are). However, it is the study of literature that has classically lent itself to and gone hand-in-hand with writing instruction in the academic imagination. As such, most high schoolers get bombarded with the “five paragraph essay” format in their English classes, misinterpreted as *the* standard to which effective, thesis-driven writing holds itself. These students quickly discover that this simply is not the case and will not cut it at the college level and beyond.

So why learn it? We hope this guide will help you understand what this model is **NOT**, but more importantly what it **IS** and how it should be used to help you better understand the complex inner working of effective academic writing.

### IS

- A Template
- A Way of Thinking about Writing Structurally
- A Model to Help You Plan/Organize Your Flow of Ideas
- A Sketch
- One of Many Techniques

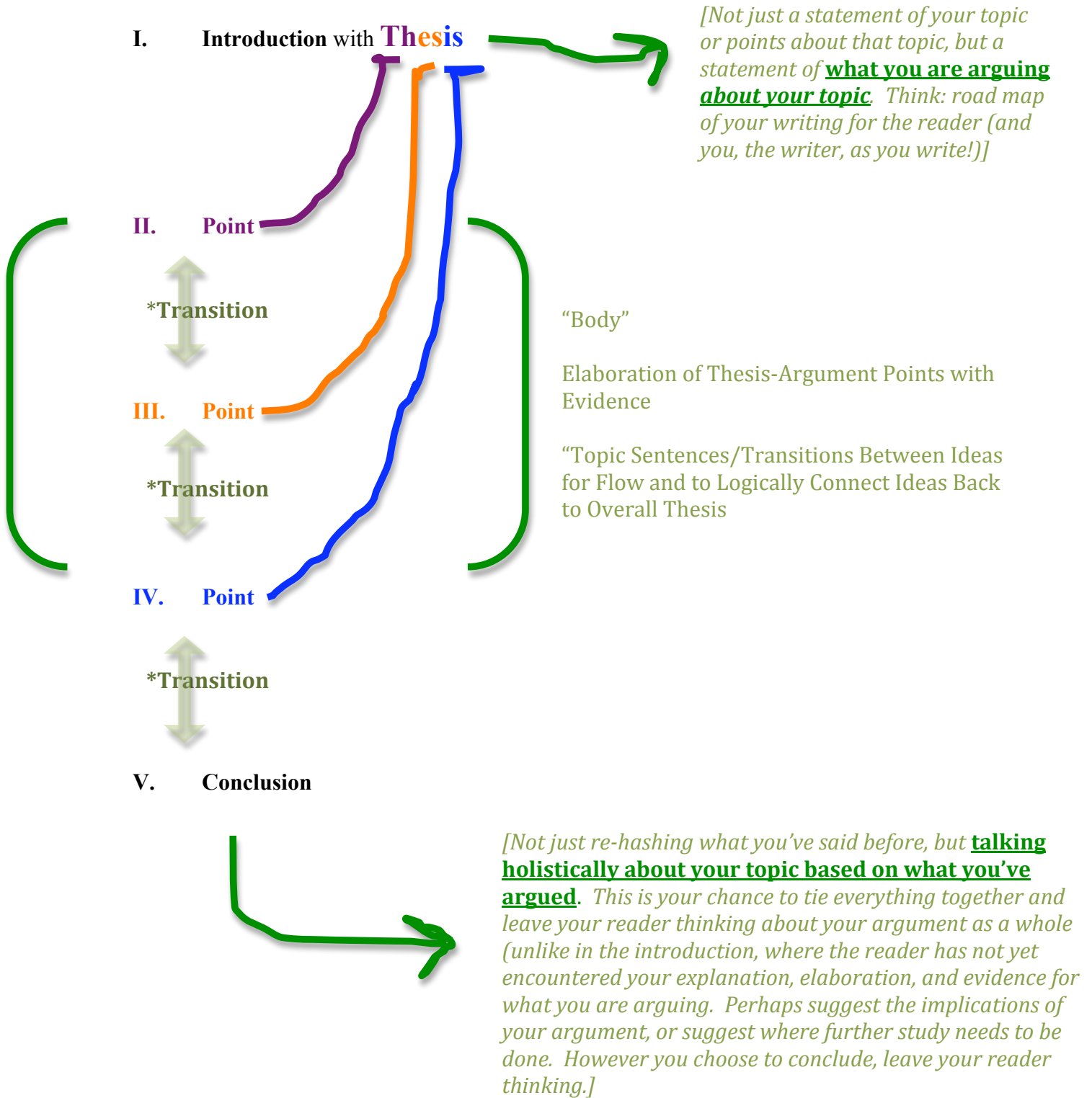
### NOT

- *The* Template
- *The* Way of Thinking about Writing Structurally
- “The Right” Model that You Should Always Use
- Picasso 101
- The Holy Grail

❖ In a nutshell, the five-paragraph essay is all about **understanding form**—it is **not a form** in and of itself.

We are going to break it down for you so you can see it for what it is...no more of this “man behind the curtain.” Just like the people of OZ discovered that their wizard was just a man, so too one of the best discoveries you can make as an academic writer is that this “magical A+ formula” is really just an ordinary tool in your toolbox: it is only magical if understood and used correctly by a writer willing to put in the effort to do so. Otherwise, the only thing it produces is writing that is bland and, well, “muggle-like” (i.e. not collegiate status). And most importantly, you will limit yourself and miss the chance to fully engage critically with the material and your understanding of it.

So, this is what it looks like broken down:



❖ This is how basic academic (and certainly literary criticism) writing “ticks.”

- ❖ This **is not** the form you must follow every time.
- ❖ This **is** a great way to understand how the different parts of your writing should link up and function with one another, no matter what form you choose to use.

Use this model **not** to box yourself in and make everything fit into five paragraphs (this is, for the most part, impossible to do with information at this point in your academic career), but **to get an idea of how the parts of your essay work together to give your reader (and, in many ways, as you are writing it, yourself) your argument.** How you do that is up to you. You may end up with three main parts of your argument. Maybe you have one. Maybe seven. Maybe your introduction is two paragraphs long. Maybe you need five paragraphs to fully explain and substantiate (with evidence) five sub-points to your first argument point and then just one for the other two. The point is that no matter how you as the writer decide to organize, this model can help you keep things structured, connected, and “ticking.”

- ❖ Remember: the writing center is a great place to come if you want help figuring out the best way to organize your essay.