

## PSY 225 – Research Methods Professor Gernsbacher’s Lecture Video “Five-Paragraph Model”

In this video, I’ll be explaining how to use the Five-Paragraph Model for writing essays and other writing tasks.

Perhaps you’re already familiar with the five-paragraph model. You might have learned about it in high school or even middle school.

But because I love the five-paragraph model, and I use it in almost all my writing, including journal articles and research grants, I’m always surprised at the number of college students who haven’t heard about it. So, I’m excited to share the five-paragraph model with you.

You might be wondering: Why do I love the five-paragraph model so much? I love it

**CLICK:** because it makes my job, as the writer, much easier by providing a ready-made structure for whatever I want to write. I also love it because my following the five-paragraph model

**CLICK:** makes my readers’ job easier. Readers can more easily follow and understand what I’ve written, when I write according to the five-paragraph model. And I love it because

**CLICK:** it is versatile: I can, and I have, used the five-paragraph model for a wide range of writing tasks. In fact, as a senior, well-established professor and researcher, I use the five-paragraph model, just about all the time.

So, what **is** the Five-Paragraph Model?

**CLICK:** As its name suggests, the Five-Paragraph Model comprises five paragraphs, which I’ve illustrated here with five rounded rectangles. For a standard 400- to 500-word essay, each of these paragraphs will comprise 75 to 100 words.

However,

**CLICK:** the **magic** of the Five-Paragraph Model is that each of these five paragraphs don’t serve the same function, so it’s better to think of the five-paragraphs in this layout.

One paragraph on top, three paragraphs side by side, and one paragraph below.

The top paragraph, which is our Paragraph One, serves as our

**CLICK:** Introduction Paragraph. The bottom paragraph, which is our Paragraph 5, serves as our

**CLICK:** Conclusion Paragraph. The three middle paragraphs, which are our Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4, serve as our

**CLICK:** Supporting Paragraph A, Supporting Paragraph B, and Supporting Paragraph C. Our finished essay will look something like this,

**CLICK:** with five paragraphs arranged, linearly on a page. BUT when we are outlining our essay, we should work with the layout I just showed you.

**CLICK:** Our Introductory Paragraph on top, our Conclusion Paragraph on bottom, and our other three paragraphs, which are our Supporting Paragraphs, in the middle.

And the secret trick of using the Five-Paragraph Model is that we are going to work on those

**CLICK:** three middle paragraphs first! Those three paragraphs, which are our Supporting Paragraphs, are just what their name implies: they support our thesis. And they do so by providing three arguments in favor of our thesis.

For example, let's say our essay is about the value of the Five-Paragraph Model. Our three supporting paragraphs will, therefore, each present one, of three, reasons why the Five-Paragraph Model is so great.

So, for this essay,

**CLICK:** our three supporting paragraphs will present Reason A, Reason B, and Reason C. To begin outlining our essay, we simply need to think of and then write down three reasons. I've already done that, and my three reasons are

That the Five-Paragraph model

**CLICK:** provides a ready-made structure for whatever I want to write. That the Five-Paragraph model

**CLICK:** makes my readers' job easier by making it easier for readers to follow what I've written. And that the Five-Paragraph model

**CLICK:** is versatile, I can use it for a wide range of writing tasks.

These three reasons support our thesis, and when we flesh out each reason to be its own paragraph, we have three of our five paragraphs written. We're three-fifths of the way home!

After we've identified our three reasons and fleshed out each reason to its own paragraph, our thesis statement just about writes itself, for example, from these three reasons we can create this Thesis Statement:

**CLICK:** "The five-paragraph model is a valuable tool for many writing situations because it structures my writing, it aids my readers, and it's versatile."

Like this example, your Thesis Statement should also capture all three of your supporting reasons. That's why it's best to write your Thesis Statement **AFTER** you write your three supporting paragraphs. If you try to write your Thesis Statement before you write your three supporting paragraphs, you might find that you can't fully flesh out one of your paragraphs for one of your reasons, and you need to re-think one of your reasons.

So, it's best to write your Thesis Statement **AFTER** you write your three supporting paragraphs. And, as you probably know, the Thesis Statement goes in

**CLICK:** the first paragraph. And your Thesis Statement is typically **the last sentence** in your first paragraph. The first sentence of your first paragraph is your

**CLICK:** hook. A hook sentence serves to *hook* or otherwise grab the reader's attention. A hook can even be two sentences, but probably no more than two sentences in a 400- to 500-word essay. Most importantly, your hook should be memorable, enticing, and, above all, inviting.

OK, so we've identified our three reasons, and we fleshed out each reason for our three supporting paragraphs. We've written our Thesis Statement, which captures all three of our supporting reasons. We've written a compelling hook, although our hook is not shown on this slide. And we've fleshed out our first, introduction paragraph.

If so, we've already written four-fifths or 80% of our essay. We're on easy street. The only thing we need to do now is to write our

**CLICK:** fifth, conclusion paragraph. And there's a recipe for that paragraph, too. Our goals for our fifth conclusion paragraph are to

**CLICK:** restate our thesis statement, which in turn summarizes our three reasons, and to leave our readers with an interesting final impression by saying something witty or profound, such as

**CLICK:** “I wished my life was as well structured, versatile, and easy to follow as the five-paragraph model.”

OK, that final sentence might be a low bar for witty, and it’s definitely a low bar for profound, but you get the point.

My particular low-bar-for-witty sentence is actually serving two purposes for me: It’s serving the purpose of restating my thesis statement, which summarizes my three reasons, and it serving the purpose of attempting to be profound. Sometimes you can’t meet both goals in one sentence, and instead you will need restate your thesis statement in a sentence that is separate from your final profound bang.

So, now you know the five-paragraph model.

**CLICK:** Three reasons or arguments, each fleshed out to a paragraph,

**CLICK:** an introduction paragraph with a hook as your first sentence and a thesis statement that captures all three reasons as your last sentence,

**CLICK:** and a conclusion paragraph that restates your Thesis Statement and ends with a bang.

Let’s look at another application of the Five-Paragraph Model; let’s look at applying the Five-Paragraph Model to an essay where we’re not providing three reasons in support of or against our thesis. Instead, we’re providing **three examples**.

**CLICK:** Again, we start with five paragraphs. Because each of our five paragraphs don’t serve the same function,

**CLICK:** We arrange our paragraphs in the layout with

**CLICK:** our Introduction paragraph on top,

**CLICK:** our Conclusion paragraph on the bottom,

**CLICK:** and our three supporting paragraphs in the middle.

**CLICK:** We work on these three supporting paragraphs first. And because we’re using examples to support our thesis, we’ll label these three supporting paragraphs,

**CLICK:** Example Paragraph A, Example Paragraph B, and Example Paragraph C. And our very first task is to think of our three examples. Let’s say we’re writing an essay to support the quote attributed to American actress, Erin Cummings:

**CLICK:** “At the end of the day, you are solely responsible for your success and your failure.”

Our first task is to think of three examples that support that quote. The examples could be from our own life, from someone else’s life, or from various other sources. But we need to think of three examples that support that quote.

Here, I’ll use three examples from my own life, and the three examples I’ll use are examples when I was tempted to attribute my failure to someone else rather than take responsibility for my own success and failure. My first example could be

**CLICK:** when I struggled in a class in graduate school. It was so tempting to attribute my struggle to the professor, rather than my not knuckling down and trying my hardest to master the complex material.

My second example could be

**CLICK:** when my co-authors and I didn't get a journal article published, and I initially thought it was my all my co-authors' fault. But it was a collaborative project, and the responsibility for our collective success and failure rested on my shoulders as much as theirs.

And a third example could be

**CLICK:** when I submitted an unsuccessful grant proposal, and I initially blamed the grant review panel for my grant's proposal's lack of success rather than examining how I could have done a better job.

OK, so I've jotted down my three examples, each of which support the quote. My next task is flesh out each example into a paragraph, which let's pretend that I've done.

Then, I can write my

**CLICK:** Thesis Statement, because remember that we write our Thesis Statement ONLY after we're sure we can flesh out our three supporting paragraphs.

And just like our Thesis Statement for a Reasons-type five-paragraph essay will state all three of our supporting reasons, our Thesis Statement for an Examples-type five-paragraph essay will also state all three of our supporting examples.

So, a Thesis Statement for these examples might be

**CLICK:** "Although I might have blamed my professors, co-authors, and grant reviewers, I've learned that I'm the one responsible for my success."

We then use our Thesis Statement

**CLICK:** to flesh out our first, introduction paragraph, and we remember to add a compelling hook. And, again we are four-fifths or 80% of the way there.

**CLICK:** We just need to write our fifth, conclusion paragraph, which restates our thesis statement; summarizes our three examples; and leaves our readers with an interesting final impression by

**CLICK:** saying something witty or profound.

That's how we can use the five-paragraph model to write an essay in which examples support our thesis rather than reasons.

Our examples don't have to be only from our own life. For the quotation,

**CLICK:** "Be so busy loving your life that you have no time for hate, regret, or fear," we might choose to support this quote with three examples from someone else's life,

For instance, my grandmother, who truly was so busy loving her life that she didn't have time for hate, regret, or fear. And if I drew upon my grandmother's life for examples,

**CLICK:** I'd jot down a first example, a second example, and a third example from my grandmother's life that supported the quote.

When writing an Examples-style five-paragraph essay, our three examples don't even have to be from or about the same person. We could have three examples from three different people.

Let's say we were writing an essay to support the thesis that

**CLICK:** "A great coach can turn a team around,"

Our examples could be

**CLICK:** the great coach Vince Lombardi who made magic with the Green Bay Packers, Ted Markuhbro-da who in his first year with the Baltimore Colts turned the team around so quickly they made it to the playoffs, and Bill Parcells, who turned around three teams: The New York Giants, the New England Patriots, and the New York Jets.

As another example, let's say we were writing an essay to support the thesis that

**CLICK:** TV sitcoms stereotype moms and dads, by portraying dads as doofuses and moms as saints who put up with their doofus husbands. Three examples to support our thesis could be the TV shows,

**CLICK:** Home Improvement, Everybody Loves Raymond, and the ultimate portrayal of a doofus dad, Homer Simpson.

When writing Examples-Style five-paragraph essays, our three examples that support our thesis don't even have to be people, or personal events, or even TV sitcoms, they can be behaviors and phenomena.

For example, let's say we're writing an essay to support the thesis that

**CLICK:** "The best college courses give students the skills they need for life after college."

Our three examples could be the skills,

**CLICK:** Paying Attention to Details, Working Well with People, and Meeting Deadlines,

which are human behaviors. So, our three examples are human behaviors. And in fact, we can even use an Examples-Style five-paragraph theme to synthesize the psychological science literature about human behavior.

So, that's why I love the Five-Paragraph Model so much:

**CLICK:** it will make your job, as the writer, much easier by providing a ready-made structure for whatever you want to write.

It will make your readers' job easier by allowing your readers to more easily follow and understand what you've written,

And it's versatile. You can use it for all the essays in this class and other classes; in fact, you can use it for synthesizing the psychological science literature.

For those of you planning to take the GRE, you can use it for your GRE essays.

For those of you planning to apply to graduate school, you can use it for your admissions essays.

You can even use it to write a persuasive essay explaining to your landlord three reasons why you deserve to receive your deposit back – in full!

Now, that's profound.