Structure of an Essay

- different structures for different purposes
- e.g. newspaper & magazine articles, business plan, grant application, short story, briefing papers for a politician

Psychology journal article:
     Introduction – review background literature, present hypotheses
     Method – describe who participants are & how they were selected?
          Experimental Design: What are the various experimental conditions?
               - Repeated measures or independent groups?
               - Counterbalancing?
          Procedure: chronological order of what happens to participants.
          Stimulus Materials:

     Results – What are your findings?
          Report means, sds, correlation coefficients, t values, F values, etc.
          Draw readers' attention to important findings.
          Relate findings back to hypotheses.

     Discussion – Bring everything back together.
          Remind reader of hypotheses.
          Summarize results relevant to main hypotheses
          Discuss any other interesting findings that you did not predict
          Relate your results back to the bigger picture

Book Report
- Writer free to structure the essay. No set format.

Making Connections
- Essay must be coherent. Think of a good novel or movie. Every detail is part of a larger whole and adds to that whole (Gestalt).

* * * Every sentence, every paragraph, and every section must add to and build upon what has come before so that each little bit of information connects to the structure you are creating.
     - define terms before you use them.
     - give big picture before giving details.

- Information is represented in your memory as a network. Speech is strictly serial. Speaker or write has to find a sensible path through the network.

Introductory Paragraphs

Some Possible Purposes of an Introductory paragraph
   - catch readers' interest
   - provide some context & background
   - give the reader a sense of your topic and how you are going to approach it
   - outline what issues you will deal with and how you will approach these

Note: The introductory paragraph does not read like an abstract.

Don't start the essay with a vague statement: e.g., Over the last 50 years, there has been a lot of research on memory. Get right into your topic.

* * * Write the introductory paragraphs after most of the thesis or essay has been written

Some Purposes of Final Paragraphs

   - bring together main points of the paper and formulate a conclusion
   - summarize findings and interpretations (of a research report)
   - raise questions for further research (but only if they have arisen in the course of
       your discussion)
   - call to action or recommendation for action (This would be appropriate if you
       had written an essay critical of some practice or situation and wanted to
       encourage people to take action.)

Sample Beginning Paragraphs

Paragraph below sets context and gives reason for the manuscript (Penney, Drover, & Dyck, (2009). *Dyslexia*, 15, 263 – 281.)

During four and a half years the authors worked with TM, a boy with a severe reading difficulty. We observed his progress from being unable to name the alphabet letters reliably and reading no words except *I* and *a* at the end of first grade, to the point where he was able to read simple text. At the end of this process, we realized that our observations might be useful to researchers studying reading acquisition or dyslexia, and to teachers of children with reading difficulties. We noted a sequence of phases in TM=s reading acquisition and we documented some of his phonological deficiencies. In this article we outline the early stages of alphabetic literacy in this backward reader and speculate as to how his phonological deficiencies related to his literacy development.

Penney & Godsell (1999)

In studies of short-term verbal memory, recall of recently presented auditory items is typically higher than recall of visually presented items. (For a detailed review of the literature on modality effects, see Penney, 1975, 1989.) In serial or free recall, the auditory superiority is found for items from the recency portion of the list, and no modality difference is obtained for early list items. The modality effect also disappears if auditorily presented distracting verbal material is inserted between list presentation and recall. The original interpretation of the modality effect (e.g., Crowder & Morton, 1969) was that there was an auditory sensory memory store, sometimes called *echoic memory*, which maintained a literal representation of several words or numbers for a period long enough to be useful in the typical immediate recall task. Penney (1989) proposed that there were separate processing streams for auditory and visual items that had different properties and capabilities. One of the differences between auditory and visual streams was the existence of the echoic memory trace, which lasted much longer (up to 1 min under ideal circumstances) than the corresponding visual trace (which lasted a fraction of a second).

Final Paragraph from Paper by Penney et al. (2009)

TM had difficulty discriminating many vowel contrasts. Was the Glass Analysis method useful because it somehow helped him overcome this difficulty? Did the use of rimes varying only in the vowel focus his attention on the different vowel sounds and thereby help him learn the vowel contrasts? Was the vowel discrimination difficulty linked to the early inability to tap syllables in words? We do not have answers to these questions and can only encourage investigators to examine the relationships between the phonological deficiencies exhibited by dyslexics and their deficits in reading and spelling to determine how these phonological deficits contribute to literacy acquisition failure and vice versa.

Final Paragraph for Paper by Penney & Godsell

In the study reported here, university students who were average readers or better were tested. To what extent can results obtained with university students be generalized to children with dyslexia? If efficiency of the auditory information-processing system varies on a continuum, one might expect to find individuals with greater or lesser impairments in auditory processing. Those individuals with greater impairments are likely to be classified as dyslexic, especially if other aspects of cognitive functioning are very good. Such individuals may never achieve a satisfactory level of literacy. In contrast, some students tested here had slightly below average auditory processing abilities, but they must have had well developed cognitive skills otherwise and high motivation for academic achievement. These students were able to compensate for the slight weakness in echoic memory and in their reading skills. The participants in the present study represent only part of the continuum of auditory processing ability, and in addition, above-average intelligence levels. The appearance of a crossover interaction between modality and reading ability in this restricted sample is therefore interesting and indicates that echoic memory should be investigated in a sample of truly dyslexic individuals.

Organization Within Sections (e.g. within the Introduction of a Thesis)

Introductory paragraphs – outline the organization of the thesis, or indicate that you are synthesizing research from 2 or 3 different areas. Sections on the different areas should have headings.

Outline of Introduction to Thesis

Introductory paragraphs

Topic #1 – introductory paragraph to the section, indicate goals of the section
- review one or two articles with the original findings, and then summarize follow-up studies showing the limits to or critiques of the original findings (in chronological order?)
- emphasize the findings & interpretations that are relevant to your study
- review articles using different methodologies separately and compare findings.
- studies or findings must be reviewed in some logical sequence.
- section must end with some kind of summary of points important to your study

Topic #2 etc. – same formula.

Final paragraphs of introduction – bring all main points together and formulate hypotheses or questions to be answered by your study.

For book review, think of 2 to 4 main points you want to make about the book & develop each point in 3 or more paragraphs.
- start with statement of the historical context when the book was written, a description of what the book is about and what the author's goals were in writing it, or describe the problem the book addresses. You can start with a personal statement relating to your motivation in choosing the book. You could start with an anecdote illustrating the problem addressed by a book.
- summarize main arguments or points made in the book.
- Criticize the book. Mention both positive and negative points. Don't discuss writing style unless it interferes with communication of the writer's ideas. Did the author achieve his goals?
- Discuss the impact of the book if it has been around awhile, or if it is a new publication, discuss what you think the impact will be.

- Discuss the author's treatment of the issues. Adequate? Informed? Biased?

Development of an Idea within a Paragraph
- **ONE** idea per paragraph developed in 4 to 6 sentences.

Do not start the paragraph with a statement of the conclusion you want to make in the paragraph. Pose a question or raise an issue.

The first (or sometimes second) sentence of paragraph indicates the main idea of the paragraph. In the topic sentence you indicate the issue you are addressing.
The first sentence may link to idea in previous paragraph, or last sentence may link to next paragraph.

Each sentence builds upon the previous sentences to argue a particular point. Start each sentence with "old" concepts (those discussed in the previous 2 or 3 sentences. Then add new information to connect to "old" information.

Ask yourself, "What is the point being made in the paragraph?" and "Does every sentence add directly to that point?"

The final sentence may explicitly state the key point or conclusion.

Paragraphs must have some logical order.

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(From Penney & Godsell, 1999)

The most systematic investigation of echoic memory in poor readers was conducted by Sipe and Engle (1986). They examined recall of digits presented in an unattended message in a dichotic listening task as a function of the delay of a recall cue. When the cue immediately followed the target digit, there was no difference in the performance of good and poor readers, but when the cue was delayed at all, performance of the poor readers fell below that of the good readers. The results of their experiments are consistent with the hypothesis that echoic memory of poor readers either as smaller capacity or faster decay than that of good readers or is more subject to interference.

Further suggestive evidence for a deficit in echoic memory in children with reading disability was provided by Hurford and Shedelbower (1993).