

Building a Body Paragraph

Body paragraphs are called just that because they make up the body of your paper. Each body paragraph should be organized around a main idea and have a beginning, middle, and end. But what else goes into creating a great body paragraph? Take a look at the sample body paragraph below from a real student paper about Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Love Poetry." The number before each sentence corresponds to some comments about it. While [1] and [5] should be in all body paragraphs, the other numbers list optional, yet effective, strategies for integrating and interacting with textual evidence.

[1] As the narrative continues, "she" is now only identified by external attributes, such as the physical details and movements of her body and the positions she occupies. [2] "The arrangement of her house is spare, delicate, subtly accentuating [...] "rather, *the space*, not the objects that *fill* the space" (98, 100, emphasis added). [3] The narration illustrates that "she" is defined by the spaces she occupies, not by how she actually exists as she "fill[s]" a position beyond the confinements of the respective spaces ("the house," "the space"). [4] This seems to lead to a sort of invisibility: "All along, you see her without actually seeing [...] You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces" (100). The protagonist appears an object that is not actually a person of agency: "she" is made an object through the lens of a camera defined by the spaces of which she must adapt to and occupy. [5] The story is being projected onto the protagonist, rather than the protagonist telling her story.

[1]: Topic sentence: This sentence sets the scene for the paragraph to follow. It should include an interpretation or a claim relevant to the argument of your thesis as a whole, rather than just a summary of what comes next in the text you're analyzing. Think about it as framing your mini-argument for the paragraph readers are about to read.

[2] Linking/editing quotes: You can use brackets to cut out a portion of a quote with ellipses. **Emphasize specific words using italics:** You can do this to draw readers' attention to specific words in the quote. Afterwards, be sure to include "emphasis added" in the citation.

[3]: Refer back to the language of the quote you just included: Notice how "fill[s]" is in quotation marks and refers back to the previous quote. As with the [s], you can also use brackets to add or modify grammar so the sentence flows. Another strategy is to use quotations within parentheses to include examples of what you're discussing, as in: ("the house," "the space").

[4]: Introduce the quotations you include with a phrase and a colon: A short phrase before the quotation itself helps readers start to understand the significance of the evidence to come. Note the difference between this example vs. a phrase like "Then it says" (or even [2]).

[5]: Concluding sentence: This sentence *builds on* everything that's come before it, and as such, it should not simply restate your topic sentence. What is it possible to say, now that you've considered and interpreted the textual evidence? In terms of scope, this should be related to what was discussed in the paragraph, not zoom out so far as to consider anything beyond that. The concluding sentence should also lay the groundwork for the next topic sentence (like a chain).

Which strategies from the previous page do you also notice in these sample body paragraphs? Also, note the use of dynamic verbs (“parallel,” “create,” “offset,” etc.) and modifiers (“might,” “perhaps,” etc.) in each one.

On Federico García Lorca’s “Blind Panorama of New York” (“Panorama ciego de Nueva York”):

This prevalence of the color white is offset and complicated by a second common thread that runs between the poem’s images: the destruction of things supposedly beautiful or pure. A “wedding,” intended to be a time of rejoicing, is disrupted by sorrow; “birds” are dirtied with “ash;” “boys,” emblematic of youth, energy, and vigor, are “wounded” and have become a spectacle, a piece of evidence for unemotional and uninvolved “judges.” In all of these examples, the common whiteness is a key element of the fundamental sorrow of the situation. In fact, the very *whiteness* of the ash debases the natural beauty of the birds. The paleness of the “shroud[s]” hiding the “wounded boys” serve to mark their lack of life, implying some form of suffering and destruction. The visual purity of the white is ruined or corrupted in some way in these descriptions, creating an association between it and a loss of beauty and innocence. Thus, the images and the common factors that link them speak of the pain and the harrowing nature of the mourning process, and of the ultimate sadness at the heart of the speaker’s self.

On Audre Lorde’s “A Litany for Survival”:

The sense of urgency in Lorde’s poem creates an idea of who her audience is and who the “us” the speaker refers to is. The contrasts created through “coming and going,” “inward and outward,” and “before and after” form a sense of constant change and uncertainty. This sense of uncertainty might parallel the sense of uncertainty felt in the day-to-day lives of people in economic strain. These lines also create a sense of movement in mimicking the frenzy felt by someone who has no time in the day to pause. The reference to those “who love in doorways coming and going” evokes an image of two people crossing paths, perhaps one come back from their work shift and the other leaving for theirs. This idea of not having the luxury of time further implies not only to economic strain, but to conditions of oppression that contribute to it. These antitheses (“coming and going,” “inward and outward,” and “before and after”) connote a between-ness. Those who are stuck in both the “inward and outward” or both the “before and after” could suggest those that exist between two worlds, perhaps one’s dreams and one’s reality. Being stuck on a threshold is linked to the sense of uncertainty and frenzy created in this stanza. Taken together, this suggests that the “us” refers to people of marginalized groups.