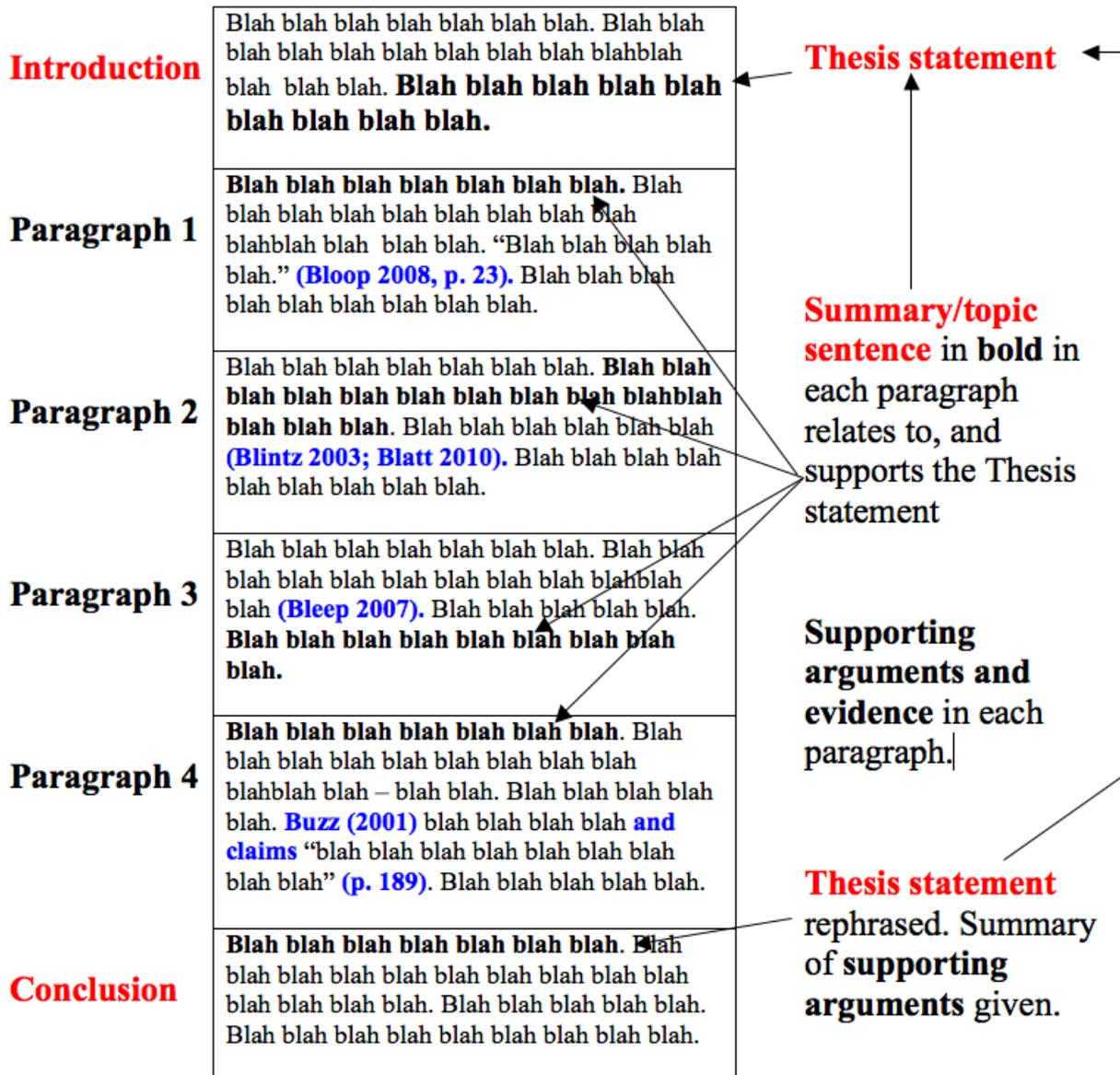


# A typical structure for an academic essay

Academic essays in English may take several forms. One typical structure is demonstrated in the diagram below. This structure includes the main point of the essay in the **introduction**. The supporting points (sub points or arguments) that you are making appear in the **paragraphs**. The number of these body paragraphs may vary depending on the length of your essay. Here we show only four. The **conclusion** more or less repeats the main idea from the introduction.

## A structure of an essay in English\*



\* There are other possible structures for essays. This is one possible one. In other languages and other academic cultures different structures may be more common. If English is your second or additional language, you might be used to writing using a different structure.

## Introduction and conclusion

In the model of an essay demonstrated here, the introduction and conclusion do similar things. They briefly introduce / summarise the topic and explain how the question or issue will be answered/has been answered. This is done through a sentence (known as the ‘thesis statement’) that directly addresses or answers the essay topic.

## Thesis statement

A thesis statement is the main point of an essay. It summarises the main aim of the essay and tells the reader what to expect in terms of an answer to the essay question (if it is given as a question) or to outline the main point being made.

Example:

*This essay outlines the most commonly proposed initiatives for addressing climate change and argues that to address this issue both practical and political solutions must be found.*

## Topic sentences

A topic sentence is the main idea for a paragraph. (This idea is sometimes referred to as an ‘argument’). You should be able to identify *one clear topic sentence for each paragraph*. It is usually (but not always) *the first sentence*. It tells the reader what to expect to read about in that paragraph. The idea expressed by the topic sentence should relate to the overall main aim of the essay (the thesis statement).

Example:

*One of the most frequently cited initiatives for addressing climate change is the development of education programs for consumers that explain how to identify products that are more environmentally sustainable.*

If you show just your topic sentences to your tutor or lecturer, she/he should be able to get a good idea of what your essay is about. Checking the topic sentences for each of your paragraphs is a good way to see if your ideas are clear, and that you are not repeating the same point. If you find your paragraph contains additional information that doesn’t relate to your topic sentence, you might need to move this extra information to another paragraph or create a new paragraph with a new topic sentence.

## The other sentences in your body paragraphs

The remainder of the ideas in the paragraph should elaborate on the topic sentence by providing more detailed description and explanation, or by providing examples. These ideas make up the evidence that backs up the idea or argument expressed by your topic sentence.

## Using references

As part of the evidence you provide for each of your topic sentences, you draw on ideas from a range of sources (e.g. the set readings for the unit or other readings you have located yourself through your research into the topic. These include materials from journals, books, reports and other sources, both hard copy materials as well as those available digitally via the internet).

In the diagram the ideas taken from other sources are acknowledged using in text references following the Harvard style (e.g. **Buzz 2001**).