“Three-/Five-Point Paragraph" Essay Format

Many students have struggled with the “Three-/Five Paragraph” essay format, one of the most common formats taught in high schools. For anyone unfamiliar with this format, the Three-/Five-Point Paragraph, essay encourages students to write an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement that outlines the arguments that will be made in the body, followed by a body of three paragraphs, one point (argument) each, which support the thesis, ending in a conclusion that restates the thesis and sums up the arguments made in each paragraph. Three points in five paragraphs; hence, the names.

For those of you who are more visual learners, this is what it looks likes:

Paragraph 1: Thesis

Paragraph 2: Point 1

Paragraph 3: Point 2

Paragraph 4: Point 3

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

Your task is to build on what you know about writing a Three-/Five Point Paragraph essay. The Three-/Five Point Paragraph essay provides a useful framework. When you build a house, you have to start with the foundation and the wooden frame. This frame gives the house shape; it’s what makes the house look like a house. However, the frame is bare, so you have to add the walls and the roof. The Three-Point-Five is like that frame. You can use it to get started in writing academic essays.

1. This format is designed to give the reader the basic arguments three times, first in the thesis,
2. then in the body, and then in the conclusion.
3. Each body paragraph relates back to the thesis, but they don’t relate to each other. This means that the arguments stand by themselves, instead of working together.
4. A Three-Point-Five Essay is totally self-contained, meaning that it does not connect with a broader topic or make room for more questions.

College professors generally do not want to see this kind of essay because they want to read complicated and more interesting papers. Professors want to know that their students can make connections between the different parts of their arguments. Instead of presenting each paragraph as one separate argument that has nothing to do with any of the others, professors want students to think of the paper as one argument with a lot of paragraphs providing support for that argument. College professors want students to know that there is more to each subject than is given in the paper.

Understanding the Format

1. The Three-/Five Point Paragraph essay format teaches students how to support a thesis. That is an important skill to have. The thesis is like the tip of a pyramid. It needs everything underneath it to hold it up. Just like the body paragraphs,
2. The Three-/Five Point Paragraph essay teaches students how to write a paragraph. Each paragraph has to connect with every other paragraph in some way. Each paragraph should discuss one idea.
3. If you're having trouble building onto the Three-Point-Five essay, here are some tips:
4. Make sure that your body paragraphs are connected. You can do this by looking for similarities or differences. You can say things like, "[My current point] is similar to [something I talked about earlier] because they both [mean the same thing]. Or, "Unlike [my last point], [my current point does something else].
5. In your conclusion, do not just restate your thesis and summarize your argument. Bring in a new perspective. Think about new questions your arguments raise. Think about how your paper fits into a larger understanding of the topic discussed.

The Three-/Five Point Paragraph essay is just one method of writing.