

LUC WRITING CENTER – “THE ESSAY-PARAGRAPH EQUATION”

While outlining, do you ever wish that you knew exactly how many **body paragraphs** should be in your essay? Since each body paragraph starts with a **topic sentence** (i.e. “point” that you will go on to prove) it would be nice to know how many topic sentences you need to write.

Actually, you **CAN** find and plan this out if you use a very simple mathematical formula that works for any paper of any length! All you need to write a much more solid outline is to have is **the essay prompt**, listing your teacher’s requirements for your paper and make the following 4-step calculation:

1) First, what is **the page limit** for your essay?

If your essay prompt says 6-8 pages, that means at minimum your teacher requires a 6-page essay, and at maximum, an 8-page essay. For the purposes of this exercise, let’s say **you will write a 6-page essay.**

2) Secondly, how many **paragraphs should you write per page?**

You should write between 1 ½ and 2 paragraphs in a paper that is less than 10 pages. (Above 10 pages a page can contain anywhere from 1-2 paragraphs.) **Let’s say you are going to write 2 paragraphs per page.**

3) So, make the following calculation:

6 pages x 2 paragraphs per page = 12 paragraphs total in your paper.

4) But that still doesn’t give you the total number of **topic sentence paragraphs**. Which paragraphs do you already **KNOW** are going to be in your essay no matter what?

Two, to be precise: your **intro paragraph** and your **conclusion paragraph**. So, to figure out the total number of topic sentences you need to write (i.e. how many body paragraphs will be in your essay) you need to **minus 2 paragraphs from your total:**

12 paragraphs – 2 paragraphs (intro and conclusion) = 10 body paragraphs in your paper.

Now you have two options. You can write 10 separate topic sentences that all make a new point that supports your thesis. You could also focus on the same theme for 2 paragraphs, meaning that the first topic sentence will raise the issue and the second paragraph continue exploring a separate facet of the same issue.

Either way, knowing that you have 10 body paragraphs can make the job of outlining a lot easier and help you keep your subject focused in the early stages of structuring your essay.