Basic Essay Structure

An Essay is Like an Hourglass

Essays should follow this basic structure. Basically, imagine your paper like an hourglass. All of the sand is in the top at the start of your paper. The sand is going to be your ideas that make up the paper, so introduce them to your reader so that they know which ideas are there.

As your introduction progresses, your ideas narrow and get more specific until you get the most specific sentence of your entire paper—your thesis statement.

All of your ideas get funneled through the narrow part of the hourglass, which will be your thesis statement. Everything that will be in your paper must be touched on, at least in some way, in the thesis statement; otherwise, it would be irrelevant.

After passing through the thesis statement, the ideas pass through the body of the paper. Notice that the body does not broaden or narrow. That is because everything that you mention in this section exists to support the strength of the thesis. You cannot bring in new ideas that were not introduced in the introduction and you cannot focus your paper any more than it had already been focused in the thesis.

After the body paragraphs have finished, you enter into the last section of your paper, which is your conclusion. Like your thesis, your concluding thesis needs to touch on all of the ideas of your paper. Also, your conclusion will go from narrow ideas to broad ideas that will put the ideas of the paper back into a wider idea.

Tips for Essay Parts

Introduction
Introduction – Eases the reader into the idea of the paper. The first sentence can be a broad or narrow as you want but you have to narrow from that point. You cannot start narrow, broaden, and then narrow again. The thesis is the most narrow because it does represent your entire paper.

Body
Starts with a topic sentence that relates back to the thesis and, like the thesis, represents the whole paragraph’s argument. The body paragraphs support the thesis with strong points of proof. Instead of quoting, paraphrase if you can. Quotes should garnish the paragraph instead of be the paragraph. The paragraph ends when you are done with that idea.

Conclusion
If you are stuck on your conclusion, look at your introduction. They should reflect each other. Write the conclusion as if you have been enlightened by your paper. It begins with a concluding thesis that answers “By doing ________, ________ does ________.” For example, “By making Pip’s benefactor an escaped convict, Charles Dickens shows that societal success is fragile and based on nothing permanent.” End your conclusion on a broad statement that frames the idea of the paper on a wider scale.