

Obituary: The Five-Paragraph Essay



The Five-Paragraph Essay, age unknown but believed to be incredibly old, passed away quietly in classrooms across the country in 2025. For generations, it guided students with its familiar structure, offering organization, clarity, and the comfort of knowing exactly what every paragraph was supposed to do. Teachers appreciated its simplicity. Students appreciated its predictability. With an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion that repeated everything again, it was reliable and proud of its consistency.

However, as writers grew more confident, its limitations became harder to ignore. The Five-Paragraph Essay often forced ideas into small, rigid boxes, even when topics were more complex or demanded deeper analysis. Instead of encouraging real thinking, it sometimes oversimplified issues and reduced writing to a formula. As Laurie Endicott Thomas reminds us, "Effective writing depends on the meaningful flow of ideas, not on strict adherence to a predetermined formula" (56). This insight weakened the Essay significantly.

The official cause of death was complications from structural rigidity, worsened by a long battle with creativity and critical thinking. Open form writing, student voice, and teachers encouraging originality proved too much for its outdated frame. Many students realized that writing is not supposed to be a checklist but a space for discovering ideas.

It is preceded in death by overused thesis statements, repetitive conclusions, and topic sentences that all sounded identical. It is survived by open form essays, narrative writing, multimodal projects, and students who can finally write with depth and individuality.

The Five-Paragraph Essay will be remembered with a mix of nostalgia and relief. Some will honor it for the stability it once provided, especially to nervous writers. Others will celebrate its departure as an opportunity to write with authenticity and express ideas more naturally. Services will be held in classrooms across the nation, where ideas are now free to expand beyond five neatly measured parts.

In place of flowers, please send strong transitions, meaningful ideas, curiosity, and writing that flows with purpose rather than formula.

