At the college level, instructors expect essays that are more than just book reports or summaries. There are several key components of any successful college essay.

**Thesis**
Almost every essay you write in college will need a thesis. Your thesis is the argument your essay makes, and it must be an argument, not just a statement of topic.
- “This paper will discuss tropical birds” is a statement of topic, not a thesis.
- “We must devote more funding to saving tropical birds” is a thesis, because it presents an argument.

In general, you should make your thesis clear by stating it in a complete sentence at the end of your essay’s introduction paragraph. This sentence is your thesis statement.

**Support**
The body of a college essay consists of support for your thesis. Think of your support as the proof of your argument. Support will generally either come from your assigned reading or from outside research.

You must support any assertions you make. If you’re writing an essay on an assigned reading, and you wish to argue that the author is sexist, you must find relevant quotes or examples in the text to support that argument. If you’re writing a research paper that argues against the teaching of evolution in public schools, you must present evidence that teaching evolution has negative consequences.

Organize your support into paragraphs. Each paragraph should only make one main point and should include evidence that supports that point.

**Citations**
When you use outside sources to support your arguments, you must provide citations. Citations, along with your Works Cited or bibliography pages, give proper credit to the original authors of the work you’re using. Citations also show that you are not stealing someone else’s work or ideas and allow your reader to easily locate the sources of your information. Refer to your teacher’s preferred citation style for specifics and come to the English Center for help with citations.
Planning Your Paper

1. What is your thesis? Write it out as a complete sentence.

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Look closely at your thesis statement. Does it contain a clear argument? If not, work on coming up with one that does.

2. How do you plan to support your argument? List some ideas and research sources here.

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3. In what format (MLA, APA, etc.) does your teacher prefer you to cite sources? If you are unsure of how to use your teacher’s preferred format, visit the English Center to learn how to do so.