

Body Paragraph Details

Another point I must repeat right now: in each example, you will spend about 6 sentences **describing the story in detail**. As I mentioned before, you must not use those sentences to introduce the situation or give background information; that might be necessary for the story, but it does not support the thesis. You need to support the thesis statement as much as possible.

The same is true for any kind of analysis or explanation beyond the example story. Such analysis is **less specific**, and therefore not as good for support. You might add that, but it must not be counted as part of the 6 sentences to describe the story.

As an example, here is a badly written story.

The movie theater I worked at was a "repertory" theater, one which mostly showed double-features of older movies. Each movie was supposed to get 35% of the ticket income. If you showed two movies together, then each one would get 35% for a total of 70% of ticket sales. The theater would only get 30%. **My boss didn't like that, so he decided to cheat. He would dishonestly under-report the number of tickets sold, so he wouldn't have to give the studios the full ticket income.** Naturally, the studios didn't like that. One studio, Orion Pictures, sent a "head counter," someone pretending to be a customer who would sit in the back of the theater and count how many people were there. He discovered that the numbers were different. The studio then sued my boss.

Notice that the first 4 sentences of the story are explaining the theater situation; none of that supports the idea that my boss was dishonest. The last 4 sentences described the studio's reaction; again, that says nothing about my boss. The ticket sales and studio actions are interesting **but unnecessary** for this essay. In fact, explaining the ticket sales percentages might make a reader feel sympathy for Bob. **Only one line, the line in bold, describes my boss, and there is not much detail there at all.** You cannot do this kind of writing. Instead, you have to write the story where the **main focus** is on the topic of your essay, and that person's character point. As much as possible, **every line** must say how Bob was unprofessional. Also, notice that the story is **general** and does not describe only **one event**.

Here is the same story, written better:

The theater was required to report all ticket sales and give the studio which owned the film a certain percent of the income. **Bob was greedy, and wanted more for himself, so he decided to cheat. Every evening, after the last show began, Bob would lock himself in the theater's office in secret, but one night he let me stay as I cleaned up. Bob had the ticket sales reports I had written, but he took out a fresh sheet. Shamelessly, he started to re-write the sales report. He would decrease the sales amounts, falsely making it seem like fewer customers had paid for tickets. He carefully balanced the numbers, deceptively making them look more "real." When he was finished, the forged report only claimed half the number of tickets were sold.** He did this for years until one studio finally caught on, and sued him.

Do you see the difference? Only one line at the start to explain only the necessary information to understand the ticket sales, and only one line at the end to serve as a mini-conclusion. **Every other line in between focused on Bob—not me, not the studio—and expressed how unprofessional he was.** That is good support. I could have explained more about the ticket sales percentages or the studio's reaction, but that's off topic. It's not about Bob. It doesn't directly support the thesis statement or topic sentence.

Also, notice that I told about one event on one evening; I was able to use details that would be more difficult to use if it was a general "he always did this" kind of explanation.

Also note the supporting descriptive words that directly and indirectly support the thesis: greedy, cheat, locked, secret, a fresh sheet, shamelessly, re-write, falsely, deceptively, forged.

Why am I mentioning this now? Because **when you write your outline, you should think about how much specific detail about that specific one story you can write**, and how you can avoid too much intro/background information and conclusion material. Look at all your examples (A, B), and the few lines you wrote about the story highlights (1, 2, 3), and try to understand if each example **might not be easy to fill up with a specific, detailed telling of the main story in a way that supports the main ideas.**