

# Introductions and Conclusions

*Introductions and conclusions are two of the most important parts of a paper, yet these sections can also be the most challenging to write. Because introductions and conclusions should be closely connected and should complement each other, this handout deals with both topics. Explanations as to why introductions and conclusions are important, as well as descriptions of proven strategies for writing effective intros/conclusions that can be applied to your writing, will be outlined. As always, before you start your paper, make sure you understand the assignment and the instructor's expectations.*

## The Introduction

Although in theory it would seem that the introduction of a paper should be written first, that is not necessarily true. Sometimes writers do not draft the introduction until partway through the paper, but instead begin with the body of the paper. This is an acceptable plan; there is no rule that says the introduction must be the first part of the paper to be written. As long as you make sure your body paragraphs and your conclusion match what you eventually write in your introduction, your paper will be clear and make sense to your reader.

### What should an introduction do?

- spark an interest in readers—they should want to continue reading past the first few lines.
- lay a foundation for the body of the essay.
- introduce the context of the issue to be addressed in the thesis statement.
- set the tone for the rest of the paper.

### What should an introduction NOT do?

- open with commonly known/understood information, as in: “Smoking poses a major health risk to a pregnant woman’s unborn child.”
- announce what the essay will do, as in: “This essay will be about . . .” or “In this paper, I will describe . . .” (Check with the instructor. There are some cases when this kind of opening is appropriate.)
- make promises that will not be kept or ask questions that will not be answered.
- use facts or information that only contain part of the truth or is of little relevance to the main topic. This tricks the reader, and damages the writer’s credibility.

### Effective general strategies—these can be applied to nearly any type of essay:

- ask questions which will be answered in the text.
- highlight a startling or unusual piece of information or evidence that triggers reader interest and further relates to the purpose of the essay.
- develop a description of a person, place, or concept that will be explored in the essay.
- present background information that will intrigue the reader and will also serve as a foundation for the thesis and the rest of the essay.

### Examples of Introductory Statements:

- Direct openers: a general statement that expresses a “controlling idea,” an idea that piques curiosity and leads readers to ask questions. Such statements should be clear and concise. These

types of introductory statements are best suited to non-persuasive papers, or papers in which the writer must remain objective (i.e., does not express his/her personal opinion on the topic).

- Weak opener: *Looking at different types of liquor advertisements, one can see that different methods are used by liquor companies to get the consumer to buy their products.*
- Strong opener: *Liquor advertisements are designed to appeal to a variety of potential customers.*
- Indirect openers: use specific and vivid language to establish rapport with the reader and lead gradually to the controlling idea. This type of introductory statement can be very effective in persuasive papers in which the writer must take a side in a debate or work to convince the readers of his/her point of view.

- Fronting: To create an “atmospheric” opener, the sentence about the liquor ads might be rewritten as follows.

*Romance. Glamour. Exotic travel. Whatever our secret fantasies may be, liquor ads skillfully combine a subtle promise to fulfill our fantasies with an inviting message about the advertised product.*

- Opening with a question: This strategy stimulates thinking about possible answers, especially when a specific answer is not obvious. The reader’s interest will immediately be engaged.

*Are you short? Overweight? Or both? If so, forget about becoming a high school principal. Recent research has shown that school superintendents rate tall, slim applicants much higher than short, chubby ones. Perhaps these results say something about society’s ideal image of a leader.*

- Opening with an anecdote: A “live” opener could be a story or concrete example.

*The more your handwriting leans to the right the more passionate you are. If it leans left, you are emotionally inhibited. Do you round the top of your letter “M”? Then your thinking pattern is slow and methodical. A v-shaped M-top shows you to be an investigative thinker, while a needle-point M-top reveals a fast, comprehensive pattern of thinking. If you apply for an important position in some companies, your handwriting may be subjected to such an analysis to determine your suitability for the job.*

- Creating suspense: Entice the audience to read on by implying but withholding some vital information.

*From everywhere it assaults us. It gets ahead of us; we take vacations to escape it, but it waits for us at our destinations when we arrive. It pollutes the environment, jostles our psyches, rattles our nerves, and erodes the tiny delicate hairs in our ears that transport sound to our brains. It is the brutal invader of inner space: noise.*

## The Conclusion

The conclusion is an opportunity to leave readers with a sense of closure. It is the last chance to reinforce the argument in the readers' minds and the last opportunity to make readers aware of your ethos (values), pathos (credibility), and logos (reasoning).

### What should a conclusion do?

- remind readers of the stance on the topic, using fresh language.
- summarize the major points made in support of the thesis.
- provide the readers with the "big picture."
- echo the ideas raised in the introduction.
- leave the reader with something to think about.

### What should a conclusion NOT do?

- In papers for the humanities, do not use "in conclusion" as an opening to the final paragraph. (In scientific writing this is sometimes acceptable; as always, know the expectations of the instructor.)
- Do not mechanically restate (copy and paste) the thesis. Simply restating the thesis is repetitive and demonstrates a lack of originality, especially in a short (3-5 page) essay.
- Do not tack a paragraph onto the end of the paper that isn't thoughtfully connected to the introduction and the body of the paper.
- Do not raise new points in the conclusion.

### Effective general strategies—these can be applied to nearly any type of essay:

- Larger significance: what idea can the readers ponder? What important lessons does the argument suggest? What is at stake for a specific group of people? What reasoned predictions can be made for the future? How will the future be better or worse?
- Call for action/Proposal: what policy or outcome is recommended? What changes need to be made? What action can the readers take to implement such changes?
- Framing: pick up on a strategy used in the introduction. For example, if you quoted Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech in the introduction to open a discussion regarding teen suicide, refer back to this in the conclusion, answering any questions previously raised in the intro.

### Types of Conclusions:

- Question: Close with a question that involves the reader. You can answer the question, or leave it for the reader to decide, based on what you wrote. The question must relate to the main idea.

*It was the worst decision of Sarah's life. She decided immediately to quit her job. Who could blame her?*

- Strong Statement: Close with a statement that forcefully states your opinion.

*A criminal, no matter his/her age, should be dealt with according to the crime. The legal system is too lenient when it comes to juvenile offenders. Laws need to be rewritten immediately so that no more serious criminals go free just because they are juveniles.*

- Summary: Close with a summary of your main ideas. However, do not repeat yourself word for word; say it in a different way. Try not to start out with, "I wrote about..." This implies that the reader did not understand what he/she just read.

*As you can see, it is not important to know everything, but it is important to know how to find the answer. There will not always be a teacher nearby with the answer. You have to learn how to research a topic, digging through sources to find what you need to know.*

## Techniques for Writing Introductions/Conclusions

### Framing

To utilize the strategy of connecting the introduction and the conclusion, use the framing technique. This strategy gives readers a sense of closure and wraps up the essay by plucking an image or idea from the opening paragraph and including it in the final paragraph.

*Sentence from intro: My grandfather had more stories than a children's library.*

*Conclusion: As you can see, my grandfather had an endless imagination that brought smiles to everyone around him.*

*Sentence from intro: When I was a child, I thought my grandfather was superman.*

*Conclusion: In short, although he is not really a super hero, my grandfather is very special to me for many reasons.*

*Sentence from intro: My pet dog has eaten my homework, destroyed my shoes, and bitten my friend, but still I can never get angry at her.*

*Conclusion: In conclusion, although she sometimes behaves badly, my pet dog will always be an important part of my life.*

### Question/Answer

Another way to connect the introduction and the conclusion is the question/answer technique. In the introductory paragraph, the writer poses a question to the reader. Then, later in the concluding paragraph, the writer refers back to the question, or in some cases, answers it.

*Question in intro: Are there really that many homeless people in the city of Indianapolis?*

*Answer in conclusion: As shown throughout this essay, the number of homeless citizens in Indianapolis continues to rise steadily each year.*

*Question in intro: Is the rising cost of healthcare truly an issue for American families?*

*Answer in conclusion: Clearly the rising costs of healthcare are having a significant impact on the average American family.*