

INTRODUCTORY & CONCLUSION PARAGRAPHS

A Guide to Catchy Openers & Strong Endings

Making a Good First & Last Impressions is not just important, it's VITAL!

Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. Usually when you sit down to respond to an assignment, you have at least some sense of what you want to say in the body of your paper. You might have chosen a few examples you want to use or have an idea that will help you answer the main question of your assignment; these sections, therefore, may not be as hard to write. And it's fine to write them first! But in your final draft, these middle parts of the paper can't just come out of thin air; they need to be introduced and concluded in a way that makes sense to your reader.

Introductions and conclusions are important components of any essay because they book-end the argument you are making in your body paragraphs.

In addition to the basic things an introductory paragraph does (like introducing the main argument and sub-claims that will appear in your paper), a good intro paragraph should also:

- 1.) eases the reader into the topic gradually
- 2.) fosters a connection between the writer (you) and the audience (your reader)
- 3.) compels them to keep reading (by not showing all of your cards right away)

Similarly, the conclusion should do much more than restating your thesis and summarizing what points were made in the essay. The conclusion should also:

- 1.) Connect all the information together and synthesize it into a “take away” for your reader
- 2.) Suggest possible outcomes to your stance being ignored or enacted on
- 3.) Make clear why your topic is timely and important

**REMEMBER: YOUR
INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION
ACT AS BRIDGES THAT
TRANSPORT YOUR READERS
FROM THEIR OWN LIVES INTO THE
“PLACE” OF YOUR ANALYSIS.**

INTRODUCTIONS

Pro Tip 1: Don't jump straight into your argument—ease your reader into your essay

By providing an introduction that helps your readers make a transition between their own world and the issues you will be writing about, you give your readers the tools they need to get into your topic and care about what you are saying.

- Note that what constitutes a good introduction may vary widely based on the kind of paper you are writing and the academic discipline in which you are writing it. If you are uncertain what kind of introduction is expected, ask your instructor.

Strategies for Writing an Effective Introduction

■ Attract the Reader's Attention

- Begin your introduction with a "hook" that grabs your reader's attention and introduces the general topic (ex: Reveal a common misconception about your topic, share an anecdote that captures your topic, do the "picture this opening" where you describe a scene in great detail).

■ State Your Focused Topic

- After your "hook", write a sentence or two about the specific focus of your paper. What is your paper about? Why is this topic important? (Note: *make your awareness of both sides of argument known in the first few sentences of the intro (analogy: don't tell me Taylor Swift is an awful musician without making your awareness of her success, popularity and accolades clear to your reader)*)

■ State your Thesis

- Finally, include your thesis statement. A good way to test the strength of your argument is to do "the Thesis Test", by asking yourself the follow questions about your thesis:
 - Is it a self-contained sentence? (not a question or dependent on earlier sentences)
 - Does it pose an argument? (not a statement of fact or a declaration of intent)
 - Does it offer an opposable argument? (Ex. Saying, "sexual assault is a violation" is a statement, while saying "sexual assault is a violation and offenders should receive greater punishment" is an argument)
 - Is it clear, specific and concise?
 - Is it grammatically correct? (check punctuation and syntax too!)

Four Less Effective Types of Introductions

- **The Placeholder Introduction:** This kind of introduction contains several sentences that are vague and don't really say much. They exist just to take up the "introduction space" in your paper.
 - Example: Slavery was one of the greatest tragedies in American history. There were many different aspects of slavery. Each created different kinds of problems for enslaved people.
- **The Webster's Dictionary Introduction:** This introduction begins by giving the dictionary definition of one or more of the words in the topic/issue you're writing about. This kind of introduction is cliché and boring, and rarely engage your reader.
 - Example: Webster's dictionary defines slavery as "*the state of being a slave*," as "*the practice of owning slaves*," and as "*a condition of hard work and subjection*."
- **The "Since the dawn of man" Introduction:** This kind of introduction generally makes broad, sweeping statements about the relevance of this topic since the beginning of time, throughout the world, etc. It is usually very general (similar to the placeholder introduction) and fails to connect to the thesis. Again, cliché and boring and often times inaccurate because the thing you are talking about may not have existed at the "beginning of time."
 - Example: *Since the dawn of man, slavery has been a problem in human history.*
- **The Declarative Introduction:** This introduction takes on the language and writing style of a paper Proposal rather than the paper itself.
 - Example: *My essay will discuss the history of slavery and the moral and ethical issues behind slavery.*

Don't tell your reader what your essay will do--just do it!

How to Evaluate the Strength of your Introduction

- Ask a friend to read your introduction and then tell you what he or she expects the paper will discuss, what kinds of evidence the paper will use, and what the tone of the paper will be. If your friend is able to predict the rest of your paper accurately, you probably have a good introduction.

Pro Tip 2: Pay special attention to your first sentence. Start off on the right foot with your readers by making sure that the first sentence actually says something useful and that it does so in an interesting and polished way.

CONCLUSIONS

Pro Tip 3: The same way you eased your reader in, try to leave them feeling glad they read your paper.

Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers from their own lives into the “place” of your analysis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your readers make the transition back to their daily lives.

- Note that your conclusion can go beyond the confines of the assignment and has the ability to push the writing beyond the boundaries of the basic prompt—it allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.

Strategies for Writing an Effective Conclusion

■ Play the “So What” Game

- *If you’re stuck and feel like your conclusion isn’t saying anything new or interesting, read it out loud. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask yourself, “So what?” or “Why should anybody care?” Then ponder that question and answer it.*

■ The ‘Bookend’ Approach

- This strategy brings the reader full circle. For example, if you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay is helpful in creating a new understanding. You may also refer to the introductory paragraph by using key words or parallel concepts and images that you also used in the introduction—but NEVER paraphrase your introduction and just say the same thing all over again!

■ Synthesize, don’t Summarize

- *Include a brief summary of the paper’s main points, but don’t simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.*

■ Point to broader implications.

- *Explain why this topic is timely or important/remind me the reader why the told should matter to them personally. Begin by offering a possible cause/effect outcome if the issue you’re fighting for goes unresolved (ex: “If _____ does not take steps to fix _____ then _____ will happen.”)*

- **Return to the Theme or Themes in the Introduction**
 - Restate a *REVISED* thesis statement that acknowledges all of the information you've provided in your essay by explaining how your subtopics are connected (especially if you haven't done so already).
 - relationship you've developed with the reader during the paper
- **Balancing between an Authoritative and Familiar Tone**
 - Your tone and approach should reflect the relationship you've developed with the reader during the paper. Hopefully that relationship involves your reader trusting your authority and knowledge on the subject matter and enjoyment of reading your writing.
- **Propose a Course of Action, a Solution to an Issue, or Questions for Further Study.**
 - Offer some of the necessary steps to achieve the goal you have argued. You can offer hypothetical (though also realistic) outcomes to remind readers of what is at stake by ignoring or denouncing your argument. Tell the reader what you want him or her to do. Is your essay a call to action? If so, remind the reader of what he/she should do. If not, remember that asking the reader to think a certain way is an action in itself.
- **Tie it up in a bow**
 - Most importantly, your conclusion should CONCLUDE! Leave the reader with something to take away—Imagine you're a lawyer making your closing argument to the jury: Your goal is to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that your stance is sound, correct and well-informed and they should agree with you point of view.

Things to Avoid

- Beginning with an unnecessary, overused phrase such as “in conclusion,” “in summary,” or “in closing.”
 - *Although these phrases can work in speeches, they come across as wooden and trite in writing.*
- Ending with a rephrased thesis statement without any substantive changes OR Stating the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion.
 - *Sometimes in writing we realize our best thesis appears in the conclusion, but during revision you should be reorganizing to make sure your argument is clear in paragraph one!*
- Introducing a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion.
 - *All evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) should be in the body of the paper, don’t open a new can of worms in your conclusion!*

Three Less Effective Types of Conclusions

- **The “That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It” Conclusion :** This conclusion just restates the thesis and is usually painfully short. It does not push the ideas forward. People write this kind of conclusion when they can’t think of anything else to say.
 - *Example: In conclusion, Slavery was in fact one of the greatest tragedies in American history as proven through my essay.*
- **The “Sherlock Holmes” Conclusion :** Sometimes writers will state the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion. You might be tempted to use this strategy if you don’t want to give everything away too early in your paper. You may think it would be more dramatic to keep the reader in the dark until the end and then “wow” him with your main idea, as in a Sherlock Holmes mystery. The reader, however, does not expect a mystery, but an analytical discussion of your topic in an academic style, with the main argument (thesis) stated up front.
- **The “Grab Bag” Conclusion:** This kind of conclusion includes extra information that the writer found or thought of but couldn’t integrate into the main paper. You may find it hard to leave out details that you discovered after hours of research and thought, however adding random facts and bits of evidence at the end of an otherwise-well-organized essay can just create confusion.
 - *Example: In addition to being an educational pioneer, Frederick Douglass provides an interesting case study for masculinity in the American South. He also offers historians an interesting glimpse into slave resistance when he confronts Covey, the overseer. His relationships with female relatives reveal the importance of family in the slave community.*

THIS CONCLUDES OUR LESSON!

Remember: Introductions and conclusions can be difficult to write, but they're worth investing time in. They can have a significant influence on a reader's experience of your paper, so revise carefully!

Pro Tip 5: DON'T BE BORING!!