

# WRITING INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This handout is available in an alternative format on request

## WHY ARE INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS IMPORTANT?

The introduction and conclusion frame your essay, moving the reader into the specific world of your essay and back out again into the world in general. To do this, the introduction presents the purpose of your essay, while the conclusion presents its significance. A poor introduction will make the reader reluctant to read on while a poor conclusion will leave the reader wondering why they read the essay. Carefully crafting the introduction and conclusion is thus a crucial part of the writing process, and is best done after you've written a rough draft of the body.

The introduction and conclusion are also significant parts of your argument. They:

- situate your thesis in the larger context of your essay;
- define the scope and focus of your essay;
- and, express the value of your argument.

Because they are specific to your argument, topic and discipline, there is no one formula to follow. You must devise strategies that are particular to each essay you write. However, there are general strategies to draw upon to support the purposes of the introduction and conclusion.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN INTRODUCTION?

The introduction serves a number of functions:

- It gets readers' attention and draws them into the essay.
- It sets the tone for the essay, persuading readers that your voice is intelligent and informed.
- It provides background on the specific topic to orient the readers with the particular context and purpose of your essay.
- It defines your topic and the scope of your essay to show where your argument fits into the bigger picture of the subject.
- It presents your thesis in a way that indicates the organizing structure of your essay, giving readers a map of the journey ahead.

## WHAT IS A GOOD INTRODUCTION?

A good introduction opens discussion of the subject in an engaging manner, beginning generally to orient readers, becoming more specific as it defines the particular subject and scope of your argument, and ending with the very specific focus of your thesis statement. It is like an inverted triangle, starting broadly and narrowing down to a main point. ▼

## HOW DO I WRITE A GOOD INTRODUCTION?

Again, what you will write and how exactly you will write it should be devised according to your particular essay and subject area. These are some general strategies and tips:

- Choose your words carefully to establish an engaging and educated tone.
- Define specific terms that are central to your argument. (Don't define general terms, as this is unnecessary and will seem formulaic.)
- Give a relevant historical overview of the particular topic. (Don't use the overly general and clichéd "From the dawn of time ...")
- Discuss a controversy that your argument engages with.
- Pose a question or problem that defines your scope.
- Challenge a well-known idea.
- Rewrite your introduction as your essay evolves.

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A CONCLUSION?**

The conclusion brings your essay to a close and thus strives to show that the journey has been a successful one – you have proved your argument and it is an important argument to make. This is why the conclusion usually begins with a paraphrase of your thesis statement – as if to say: “There! It is now proven!” – then ends with suggestions of how your main idea has significance in the world beyond the essay. In general, the purpose is to give the readers a sense of excitement, discovery and satisfaction.

## **WHAT IS A GOOD CONCLUSION?**

A good conclusion has the opposite structure of a good introduction. It is like an upright triangle as it begins with a focused paraphrase of your thesis statement, then broadens its scope to indicate the significance of your argument in a larger arena. ▲

## **HOW DO I WRITE A GOOD CONCLUSION?**

While the strategies you use will develop out of your assignment and argument, here are some suggestions for writing a strong conclusion:

- Place your essay in the larger context of your subject or discipline.
- Make a call to action or give a warning.
- Quote a relevant source.
- Present a further hypothesis for study arising out of your argument.
- Raise questions to complicate the issues you’ve discussed.
- Indicate how your argument challenges prevailing ideas or makes new discoveries or reframes an issue.
- Explain the implications of your findings and analysis.
- Suggest the ways in which your argument could apply to other questions, issues, or problems.
- Use terms and phrasings from your introduction to create a parallel that presents a neater frame.
- Don’t introduce a whole new argument as you can’t prove it in the conclusion.

## **HOW LONG SHOULD THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION BE?**

The length depends on the size of the essay. For a 1,000-word essay, a balanced length for the introduction and conclusion would be about 4 to 5 sentences each paragraph. For longer essays, each may be a few paragraphs, or even a few pages.

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