

Introductions and Conclusions

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Your **introduction** should present a topic, tell your audience what to expect, and make a commitment about what you will do in your paper. An interesting introduction written in a credible tone encourages your reader to continue reading.

Your **conclusion** creates the last impression readers will take with them and gives you a final opportunity to re-emphasize the main points of your paper. It should leave your readers with a sense of closure.

Both your introduction and conclusion can be one to several paragraphs long, depending on your paper's length. Format suggestions are adapted from *From Inquiry to Academic Writing: A Text and Reader* (Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky, 2nd ed., 2012).

Tips for Writing Effective Introductions

Establish the purpose and significance of your paper.

An effective introduction guides readers to your paper's main focus and gives them a sense of your intended audience and why its subject is important to them. It may also establish a context for the ongoing political, scholarly, or professional discussion surrounding the issue (the bigger picture).

Write the introduction last.

Many writers find it difficult to create an essay by beginning with the introduction. The best introductions often develop during and after writers have written a large portion of their papers. Others write a draft of the introduction and revise it often during the writing process.

POSSIBLE FORMATS

The Funnel Format

- (1) Begin with broad ideas, then narrow to your thesis. Include a statement that introduces the general subject and grabs your readers' attention.

Consider beginning with

- A question ("Did you know that levels of air pollutants common in Utah have been shown to shorten the lives of everyone, including children?")
- An interesting fact ("*The Salt Lake Tribune* ranks Utah County worst in air quality in the state. . .")
- An analogy or comparison ("If every American gave up meat for one day a week, it would be the equivalent of taking eight million cars off the road.")
- A powerful quote (Comedy writer Robert Orben once quipped, "There's so much pollution in the air now that if it weren't for our lungs, there'd be no place to put it all.")
- An anecdote ("My four-year old sister had been looking forward to her friend's party at the zoo for weeks. On the day of the event, however, she had to stay home because her asthma prevented her from venturing outdoors into the polluted air.")

Avoid

- Clichés ("A picture is worth a thousand words. . .")
- Broad generalizations ("Since the beginning of history. . .")
- Anything inappropriate for the purpose, audience, or subject of your paper.

- (2) Give the reader a short, relevant background to your argument. They need to know enough so they can see where the rest of your paper fits in with the larger discussion.

- (3) Logically lead readers to your thesis statement (a sentence that states your main idea). At this stage, readers should have a clear idea of your paper's main idea.

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The Narrative Format

- (1) Use a short story to raise the general subject (balance the story to the length of the paper).
- (2) Identify the main issue from the story.
- (3) Use the story to lead into and develop your thesis statement.

The Interrogative Format

- (1) Ask one or two intriguing questions to present the general subject to the reader.
- (2) Answer the questions in a fairly open way that allows you to transition into your thesis.

The Paradoxical Format

- (1) Present a topic with generally accepted ideas (contrary to your actual argument).
- (2) Give a paradoxical argument that challenges the normally accepted ideas.
- (3) Use this new argument to develop a thesis.

Tips for Writing Effective Conclusions

Explain the overall significance of your paper.

Your conclusion is an excellent opportunity to emphasize the answer to the question “So what?” about your paper. Why does this topic matter? What significance does it have beyond this particular paper? What are the stakes, and who might be involved? After asking and answering various questions regarding the topic, tell your readers why these answers matter. “So what?” should be answered throughout your paper as well; the conclusion is just for emphasis and reiteration. The conclusion should tie into the introduction without mimicking it.

Give the paper a sense of completion.

A successful conclusion reviews how all your ideas fit together and gives readers a sense of closure. Nevertheless, do not wait for your conclusion to show how your ideas are related to each other. Your conclusion should finalize your ideas and their relationships—not introduce new ones.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Solution or Recommendation

If your essay discusses a problem or controversy, explain steps that will resolve this controversy or fix the problem.

Call for Further Research

After exploring the topic, you may find that you do not have enough information to make a final statement about your subject. If this happens, offer detailed suggestions for further investigation.

Speculation

In some essays, you may not be able to provide definite answers, yet you may still hope to provide some sense of resolution by offering a plausible solution to the paper’s main issue. When doing so, stay close to the information in the rest of your paper.

A Call to Action

Invite readers to actively respond through social or political channels to the information presented.

Tie-Back to the Introduction

Add a sense of completion by referring to an element of your introduction. For example, if you began with a story, refer to that story in the conclusion.