

Writing Effective Introductions and Conclusions: A How-To Guide

The Introduction

The introduction moves readers from their world into the writer's world. It should let the audience know what to expect and establish the credibility of the author. Begin with broad ideas and narrow those ideas to a specific point. The initial sentence must grab the audience's attention and then lead readers logically to the thesis statement. Your thesis must state your position or argument and indicate the organization of your paper.

Keep in mind that different writing situations call for different kinds of introductions, so these are just a few of the many options available when it comes to writing the opening section of an essay.

Openings that grab readers' attention:

- Brief story or scenario that arouses readers' curiosity
- Eye-catching detail, statistic, or quotation
- Thought-provoking question
- Striking statement

Strategies for opening paragraph development:

- **Compare or contrast ideas:** You might, for example, begin your essay by providing viewpoints from an ongoing debate about your topic, working your way up to your own stance on the issue (your thesis statement).
- **Outline the scope of the issue:** By answering the reporter's questions (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?), you could give your readers important information to help them understand the issue before you share your main idea (your thesis statement).
- **Describe the topic of your essay:** If your instructor does not specify that you should describe the topic in the first body paragraph (after the introduction), you could use the opening of your essay to give your readers a basic overview of the topic (problem, event, idea, etc.) you are writing about, building up to your own idea (your thesis statement) about it.

Openings to AVOID!

- **Trite definitions:** According to Webster's dictionary ...
- **Clichés:** Since the beginning of time ...
- **The obvious:** September 11th will go down in history as a major disaster ...

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The Conclusion

For many writers, constructing the final paragraph is just as confusing as creating the introduction. However, there are several strategies to create a conclusion that will effectively reinforce major points made in the paper and make a favorable lasting impression. As with the introduction, different types of writing call for different kinds of conclusions, so keep this in mind when developing your closing paragraph.

Closing Strategies:

- **Summarize the key points made throughout the essay, stressing the importance of your thesis.** In the summary, be sure to use different words. You may add one last bit of evidence, such as a compelling scenario or example, to complete your argument. Remember that your conclusion, like all parts of your essay, must return to the thesis.
- **Relate your essay to a broader audience.** This is the “so what?” factor — your chance to prove the value or significance of your thesis beyond the essay. You should add a new insight that you have learned from writing the paper.
- **Make a call for action, especially in argumentative essays.** This might be a call for further research or another appropriate response.

Closings to AVOID!

- **A simple restatement of what you have already said:** While summarizing key points is sometimes an acceptable conclusion strategy, you should not merely repeat what you have already said in your essay. Instead, focus on what your readers should conclude after considering your main points. What new meaning or understanding about your topic should your audience gain from reading your essay?
- **Reference to the opposition:** Especially in argumentative writing, be careful to avoid referring to the opposition’s counterargument(s) in your concluding paragraph since you do not want to leave your readers thinking about reasons to disagree with you. Instead, handle counterarguments in the body of the essay.
- **An uncertain tone:** Unless you are writing a personal/reflective essay, avoid hedging phrases like “I think,” “I feel,” and “I believe,” as these undermine your confidence in your own claims and may cause readers to doubt your credibility.

For further assistance with writing introductions and conclusions, please consult your instructor, a Writing Center tutor, and/or a writing handbook.