



How Do I Write an Introduction and Conclusion?

The Introductionⁱ

The paragraph that begins an essay causes students the most trouble, yet it carries the most importance. Although its precise construction varies from genre to genre and from essay to essay, good introductory paragraphs generally accomplish the same tasks and follow a few basic patterns. The tasks and patterns are listed below, but keep in mind that what follows are guidelines and not immutable templates.

1. Tasks. The introductory paragraph to an essay usually attempts to do three things:
 - ✓ *Introduce the topic* with some indication of its inherent interest or importance and a clear definition of the boundaries of the subject area.
 - ✓ *Indicate the structure of the essay*, often with major sections of the essay or its structural principle clearly stated.
 - ✓ *State the thesis of the essay*, preferably in a single, arguable statement with a clear main clause.

Not every essay does all three in the first paragraph, and the degree to which an essay declares its structure may vary widely, depending on how necessary that information will be to the readers. Sometimes, the entire first paragraph will serve no other purpose than to generate interest in the subject or raise a question, leaving the other tasks for the second paragraph. However, this kind of opening requires a lot of skill, and you can lose your readers in the second and third paragraphs if you do not make your purpose clear.

2. Patterns. The standard pattern for an introductory paragraph follows the order of the tasks outlined above. Below is an outline of that pattern, written as if it were the first section of a formal outline of the entire essay.
 - I. Introduction
 - A. The topic
 1. Its boundaries
 2. Why it is interesting
 - B. Structure and/or methodology
 1. The essay's main sections (structure)
 2. Why they come in that order (structural principle)

3. How the author plans to draw the necessary conclusions from the information available
- C. The thesis statement (usually a single sentence)
1. Its premise (the general claim about the information available)
 2. Its conclusion (the consequences of the first claim)

Not every essay contains every element in precisely this order, but most good essays cover all of them, either explicitly or implicitly. In longer and more scholarly essays, the structure/methodology section should be longer or can even be its own paragraph. It should also include some mention of the essay's position within the field as a whole.

The Conclusion

You may be familiar with the oversimplified but essentially true dictum that in composition, the introduction is where you state your thesis, the body is where you expound upon your thesis, and the conclusion is where you restate your thesis—but this is an oversimplification. To summarize in a conclusion is not enough. Unless specifically assigned to close your paper with a “summary” rather than a “conclusion,” you ought not end your paper by summarizing what you have already said.

- ✓ Remember that a proper conclusion is not merely a summary. Otherwise it would be called...a *summary*, not a conclusion. The conclusion does indeed require a return to the thesis, but a good conclusion requires more:
- ✓ A conclusion ought to *draw some conclusion about the topic* of the paper.
- ✓ Some professors refer to this as the significance of your paper (every paper ought to have significance beyond the fact that you've been assigned a paper and must write it or else face the consequences). Other professors refer to the significance as the answer to the question “So what?” Hopefully, you'll always have an answer to that question beyond the aforementioned necessity of completing an assignment for a grade; See ARC handout on “What is a Thesis?” for more information.

Creating a Successful Conclusion for your Paper

1. Devise a transition from the body to the conclusion that doesn't abuse the old, tired clichés of composition.
 - ✓ “Finally,” “In conclusion,” “To summarize,” and “In the final analysis” should not be used when moving from the body of your paragraph into the conclusion.
 - ✓ Conclusive language *sounds* like a conclusion, and often needs no awkward signal word. If you're truly endeavoring to provide significance to your paper, you may be providing all the transition you need.

- ✓ The point is to be aware of shifting from one part of the essay to another, and to do it smoothly. (See also “Transitions” in the ARC handout on “Paragraphs”).
2. *Return* to the thesis rather than re-stating the thesis. Both you and your reader should now have a greater breadth of knowledge of your topic after experiencing your paper. So reflect greater knowledge in re-packaging your thesis for the final time in the paper.
 - ✓ Even a parrot can say the same words over again—do not repeat or otherwise echo words and phrases. (Do you like to read the same words over and over? Then why make your professor read the same words over and over?)
 - ✓ Don’t restate the thesis. Don’t even restate your major arguments. Rather, re-package them.
 3. Draw a conclusion—take some responsibility for the words you just committed to paper. Reflect some of the thought that went into the paper’s making.
 - ✓ Whether your professor calls it the “significance” or the “point” or the “meaning” or the “so what” of the paper, provide some framework for a larger discussion of the issues you’ve addressed.
 - ✓ Some helpful questions to ask when drawing your conclusion include:
 - So what? What wisdom may be derived from your essay?
 - Where do we go from here? Are there any further implications beyond what your topic could explore?
 4. Don’t introduce new or unrelated ideas in the conclusion in the name of drawing a conclusion or finding a larger significance in your argument.
 - ✓ Stay on the topic
 - ✓ Introduce new material to support your argument only within the body of your paper.

ⁱ <http://www.writing.ucsb.edu/faculty/donelan/intro.html>