Writing Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions and conclusions are two of the most important parts of a paper, but they can also be the most challenging, especially if you are writing an argumentative or synthesis essay. This handout will explain why introductions and conclusions are so important, as well as show you some strategies for writing effective intros/conclusion that you can apply to your own writing. As always, before you start your paper, make sure you understand the assignment and the instructor’s expectations.

What is an introduction supposed to do?
- Spark an interest in the reader – they should want to continue reading past the first paragraph.
- Lay a foundation for the body of the essay
- Introduce the context of the problem to be addressed in your thesis statement (if it’s a persuasive essay)

Effective general strategies: (these can be applied to nearly any type of essay)
- Ask questions which will be answered in your text.
- Highlight a startling or unusual piece of information or evidence that triggers the reader’s interest and that is related to the purpose of the essay.
- Develop a description of a person, place, or concept that will be explored in the essay.
- Present background information that will intrigue the reader and will also serve as a foundation for your thesis and the rest of the essay.

Concrete Examples of Introductory Statements:
1. **Direct Openers**: A general statement that expresses a “controlling idea”, which is an idea that piques the reader’s curiosity and makes them want to ask questions. Such a statement should be clear and concise. *These types of introductory statements are better suited to non-persuasive papers, or one where the write must remain objective (i.e., does not express his/her personal opinion on the topic).*

   **Poor**: Looking at different types of liquor advertisements, one can see that different methods are used by liquor companies to get the consumer to buy their products.

   **Better**: Liquor advertisements are designed to appeal to a variety of potential customers.
2. **Indirect Openers:** Use specific and vivid language to establish rapport with the reader and lead up more gradually to the controlling idea. *These types of introductory statements can be very effective in persuasive papers, where the writer must take a side in a debate or try to convince the reader of his/her point of view.*

   A. **Fronting:** to create a more “atmospheric” opener, you might rewrite the sentence about the liquor ads as follows:

   Romance. Glamour. Exotic travel. Whatever our secret fantasies may be, liquor ads skillfully combine a subtle promise of their fulfillment with an inviting message about the advertised product.

   B. **Opening with a question:** This strategy tends to stimulate thinking about other answers, especially when the answer is not obvious. You can immediately engage the reader’s interest.

   Are you short? Overweight? Or both? If so, forget about becoming a high school principal. Recent research has shown that school superintendents rate tall, slim applicants much higher than short, chubby ones. Perhaps these results say something about society’s ideal image of a leader.

   C. **Opening with an anecdote:** A “live” opener could be a story or concrete example.

   The more your handwriting leans to the right the more passionate you are. If it leans left, you are emotionally inhibited. Do you round the top of your letter “m”? Then your thinking pattern is slow and methodical. A V-shaped M-top sows you to be an investigative thinker, while a needle-point M-top reveals a fast, comprehensive pattern of thinking. If you apply for an important position in some companies, your handwriting may be subjected to such an analysis to determine your suitability for the job.

   D. **Creating suspense:** You can often get the reader to read on by implying but withholding some vital information.

   From everywhere it assaults us. It gets ahead of us; we take vacations to escape from it, but it waits for us at our destinations when we arrive. It pollutes the environment, jostles our psyches, rattles our nerves, and erodes the tiny delicate hairs in our ears that transport sound to our brains. It is the brutal invader of inner space: noise.

**Strategies to AVOID:**

- Don’t open your introduction with commonly known/understood information. (i.e., “Smoking poses a major health risk to a pregnant woman’s unborn child.”)
- Don’t announce what you plan to do, as in, “This essay will be about...” or “In this paper, I will describe/explain/argue...” etc. (**Check with your professor.** **There are some cases where this kind of opener is appropriate.)
- Don’t make promises you can’t/won’t keep:
  - Don’t pose questions you won’t answer later.
(Strategies to avoid – cont’d.)

o Don’t use facts or information that only contain part of the truth, or is of little relevance
to your main topic - this tricks the reader and damages your credibility as a writer. (i.e.,
don’t start a paper about the challenges women face in higher education with

**Writing Concluding Paragraph**

What is a Conclusion supposed to do?

- Bring closure: wrap up the discussion/analysis of the essay in a logical manner.
- Emphasize your position on the issue one last time.
- Leave the reader with something to think about.

**Effective Strategies:**

- Refer back to an idea or image from the introduction (perhaps suggest a new interpretation of that idea based on the information presented in the body of your paper)
- In a longer paper (5+ pages), summarize the main ideas with new word choices.
- Resolve the issue stated in the introduction, and/or speculate about what that resolution implies for the future.
- If appropriate, mention unresolved problems or questions about the issue. Help your reader understand the importance of these unresolved issues. *Make sure you stay on-topic and avoid giving too much “new” information.*

**Strategies writers usually avoid:**

- When writing for the humanities, don’t announce “In conclusion…” at the beginning of your concluding paragraph. However, “In conclusion” could be effective when used in scientific writing. Make sure you find out your instructor’s expectations.
- Don’t start your concluding paragraph with “In conclusion…” or “In this essay, I explained…”

- Don’t mention a new idea based on information not included in your essay because this may change the focus of the paper and distract readers.

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