

# Introductions and Conclusions

This resource focuses on writing introductions and conclusions for essays. We also have guidance for [intros and conclusions in science](#) writing.

## Introductions

### Essay introductions

Your introduction creates the reader's **first impression** of your essay and **previews** the essay's content. It serves **three important functions**:

- it engages the reader's interest
- it provides context for your topic
- it articulates the argument you intend to develop, via a thesis statement.

By being clear, organized, engaging and robust, a good introduction will make it obvious to the reader that you will respect their attention and that they are in good hands for the duration of the paper.

Wondering what a good introduction looks like in practice? Pay attention to academic articles and books—and also novels, short stories, and media pieces—and notice what others do to engage your attention and invite you into a piece of writing.

### Provide context

Your introduction should include the basic details necessary to the reader's understanding of your topic. For example, it should identify:

- the author and title of a literary work you are analyzing
- the time frame and geographical location of a social movement or historical event you are examining
- particular scholars or theories you will reference
- perhaps the research question that prompted your work
- any other essential contextual information.

An introduction should also provide any other context that will help the reader to make sense of the discussion to follow, such as your theoretical framework, relevant historical details, the way you will use particular terms or concepts, or the current state of debate about your topic.

Note, however, that the introduction is **not** the place to go into a detailed discussion of your argumentative points or minutiae related to your topic. A concise, well-focused introduction will engage your reader far more than will a wordy, rambling one. **Save your detailed discussion for the body of the essay.** You may provide a contextual paragraph or paragraphs *following* the introduction, to flesh out important context in more detail, but be concise.

## Engage your reader's interest

Beginning your essay with a general statement and **narrowing to a more specific focus** as the introduction progresses (the “funnel model”) is a common strategy. With this approach, ensure that your opening statement makes a direct comment about your topic; avoid opening with a statement that is *too* general. Statements that begin with phrases such as “Throughout human history” likely have little to do with your particular argument, and will repel rather than engage your reader's interest.

For example, say you are writing about the representation of racialized people in Suzan Lori-Parks' *Venus*. Here is an example of an opening statement that is **too broad**:

- *In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many playwrights wrote about race and racial themes.*

Instead, try one of these opening lines:

- *Suzan Lori-Parks' Venus considers the enduring impact of colonialization on the representation and reception of Black women's bodies.*

or

- *Suzan Lori-Parks' Venus demonstrates the tension between exploitation and celebrity in its depiction of Sarah Baartman's performances in early nineteenth-century England.*

These statements provide more specific starting points for your discussion (and yet they are, appropriately, broader than a thesis statement). The key to an effective opening paragraph is to **signal your essay's precise focus early**.

## Other effective openings

**Other effective opening strategies** include:

- offering an interesting quotation that is directly relevant to your topic
- posing a question to which you will offer an answer (or provisional answer) as the introduction progresses
- presenting a shocking fact or statistic that grabs the reader's attention and anchors the topic in a concrete way
- introducing a point of view that you disagree with, to establish your own contrasting perspective
- employing an analogy or illustration to familiarize your reader with your topic, particularly if your topic is abstract or potentially outside of the reader's experience.

## Articulate the argument you intend to develop

The most important feature of your introduction is the **thesis statement**, which usually (but not always) appears towards the end of the introductory paragraph. Ensure that your thesis statement clearly expresses the point of your paper (your claim), and that, having read your introduction, your reader has a good grasp of **what** you intend to discuss and **why it matters**. You might lead up to your thesis statement by identifying a problem or question and how current research doesn't fully address it.

Demonstrating why this problem or question matters lends context to your paper, sets up your argument, and helps engage your reader's interest.

## Other tips

You could write your introduction first, to map out the essay to follow and firm up your thesis statement as you prepare to write the body paragraphs. However, if you do write your introduction first, count on revising it after you've finished drafting your essay. Ensure that whatever you included in your introduction appears in the body of the essay, and that whatever you included in the body of the essay is previewed in your introduction. It is often a good idea to write the introduction last, once you have a firm grasp of the essay's contents.

The length of your finished introduction should be in proportion to the overall length of your essay (e.g., a brief essay necessitates a brief introduction). Finally, proofread carefully—a well-crafted, error-free introduction will make a favourable impression on your reader.

## Conclusions

### Essay conclusions

Conclusions are meant to provide a satisfying and graceful close to an essay—but no-one we know of finds them easy to write. Writers often approach the end of the essay wondering what is left to say about their topic and, consequently, put the least amount of effort into the essay's concluding paragraph(s). However, an essay's conclusion is very important—it is, after all, the last thing a reader reads, and a poorly written conclusion can undermine the positive impression created by the rest of the essay. These are the jobs of the conclusion:

- briefly re-state your claim and its main points
- briefly explain why this research / your ideas matter
- perhaps suggest a practical application of your claim
- identify queries for future related research.

Keep your conclusion a bit shorter than your introduction, and don't introduce new ideas at this point.

### Helpful strategies

**If your essays tend to end “not with a bang, but a whimper” (apologies to T.S. Eliot), the following strategies may be helpful.**

1. Provide a brief summary of the essay's thesis and main points, but reformulate these ideas in a **new way, focusing on** the way your ideas fit together, new connections, and the growth of your understanding about your topic.
2. Consider the larger **implications** of the argument you have presented—how does your argument fit into the bigger picture? **Ask yourself**, “So what?” and “What is the significance of what I've said?” Think of how your argument aligns with the larger **themes of your course** or the

wider issue of which your analysis is a part. The things you write about *do* matter, so try to convey that significance to your reader.

3. Propose a potential **solution** (or solutions) to a problem you have identified in your essay. You might also pose **questions** for further study. These strategies demonstrate that the issue you have examined is not finite, and that, rather than attempting to have the last word on the subject, you are opening the door to further inquiry.
4. Include an apt **quotation** that reflects or expands on the essay's thesis. If you used a quotation in your introduction, employing a parallel strategy to end your essay can provide a pleasing sense of symmetry.
5. Similarly, if you began your essay with a question, return to that question in the conclusion and provide a direct **answer**. Using such a rhetorical strategy demonstrates your mastery of not just your essay's content but of its structure, as well.

## Try to avoid...

In writing your conclusion, avoid:

- mechanically repeating the original thesis and argumentative points.
- failing to demonstrate that, by the conclusion, you have reached a fuller understanding of the original idea.
- introducing completely new ideas, subtopics, evidence that should have been explored in the body of the paper, or minor (usually irrelevant) details.
- bringing up a contradiction. If you address the "other side" of the issue or debate in your essay, do so early on (often immediately after the introduction, before you present your own argument). Mentioning the "other side" in your conclusion will only confuse the reader and undermine what you have said in the body of the essay.
- concluding with sentimental, emotional, or hyperbolic commentary that is out of keeping with the analytical nature of the essay. Instead, offer your reader measured, thoughtful, and useful final comments that demonstrate your credibility as a writer.

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