

UMD ARC/Writing & Reading Center

Introductions and Conclusions

What is an introduction? This question is crucial and should be answered before you begin writing one. An introduction is a paragraph or series of paragraphs whose purpose is to introduce a topic, spark interest in the reader, and establish a thesis that will be proven in the paragraphs that follow. First, narrow the scope of your paper until you have chosen a specific point you intend to make to the reader, which will serve as your thesis statement. Then, decide on an approach and establish a style that you can apply throughout the paper to maintain order and consistency. Find a way to draw your readers into your paper topic and hold their interest, either by using one of the devices listed below or applying one of your own. The thesis, or main point, is often placed at the end of the introduction, but it can appear earlier in the paragraph as long as it is identifiable. Always make sure your thesis statement is both clear and concise; otherwise, your readers might not understand the true purpose of your paper.

An introduction should

- spark interest in the reader
- introduce the reader to your general topic
- include your thesis statement

Begin your paper with...

1. **A clear statement of your topic and purpose.** This strategy is preferred for more technical types of writing based on material that will be difficult or unfamiliar to the reader.

- A typical day in the life of a college student is likely to be long and full of varied activities—academic study, a part-time job, extracurricular affairs, social gatherings, and the routine duties of daily living.

CAUTION: Avoid stale phrases such as, “In this paper I intend to...”

2. **Some history of or background on your subject.** This approach is often helpful to establish the context and suggest why it is important.

- The number of high school graduates who go on to college has steadily increased over recent years, but many of these students have no idea beforehand what a typical day in the life of a college student is like.

3. **A definition of your subject or of the key terms you used to discuss it.** This information can help the reader to follow an argument easily.

- A “typical day” is probably one that never occurs in reality because no two days are ever exactly the same. A typical day for me as a college freshman would be a composite picture, an average, formed from several quite different days.

CAUTION: Definitions quoted from dictionaries make boring beginnings because they are so general. Use one only when you must define something both complicated and unknown to your readers.

4 . **An indication of your qualifications to discuss the subject.** This should appear early in the paper so the reader will have confidence in your accuracy. As an entering freshman in college, I have been on campus only a week but I have met a great many other freshmen and think my experiences have been fairly typical.

5. **A rhetorical question.** This device can grab a reader's attention and arouse curiosity. With only a few hours a week spent in class, how can a typical college freshman claim to be busy?

6 . **A startling statement or exclamation.** This method is sure to spark curiosity. On a typical day, most college freshmen have had about four hours sleep, missed breakfast, slept through most of their classes, and have been thinking about nothing but drugs and the opposite sex—or so some magazine writers suggest.

7 . **A bit of narrative, especially if humorous, that illustrates your main point.** This approach appeals to almost anyone. My alarm rings—7:15. I leap from my bed and dash to the bathroom in hopes of a vacant shower stall. No luck. At 7:59, I slide into my seat in English class, ten seconds before the professor arrives. Another typical day has begun.

8 . **Quoted remarks,** which can draw the reader into the situation being described. "Read at least the first forty pages before Thursday," the instructor announced at the end of our first class. In all my other classes, the instructors had made a very similar announcement.

9 . **An appropriate quotation, preferably from a well-known source.** This is a classic device proven to work well. "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."—the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Bible was written many centuries ago, but this message is truer than ever, especially for college freshmen. ? A description of something familiar that is comparable to your subject. The description can help your readers picture the scene and characters involved. Ants seem to lead frantically busy lives. Around an ant hill we can watch lines of creatures rush in different directions, intent on reaching their destinations as quickly as possible, but sometimes pausing to greet each other with a wave. Between classes, the campus resembles a busy ant hill.

11. **A direct appeal to your readers' concerns or a reminder of a current issue.** This strategy can help readers identify with your subject. If you are like most high school students who plan to go to college, you are concentrating now on your grades, thinking that once you are accepted by the college of your choice, your problems will be over.

CAUTION: Do not overdo your use of these rhetorical devices. The more natural interest your readers have in your material, the less you need to make a "hard sell." Like hot spices in food, a little rhetoric can go a long way.

Conclusions

A conclusion broadens the scope of a paper by suggesting possible effects the topic may have on broader issues readers can identify with, such as society or the environment. By asking an intriguing question or encouraging your readers to take action, you will give them a greater feeling of involvement in your topic. Remember that consistency with the rest of the paper in style and approach is just as important in the conclusion as it was in the introduction. Always be sure to

restate your thesis somewhere in the conclusion to make sure your readers clearly understand your purpose, leaving a final impression.

A conclusion should:

- be consistent with the introduction in its style and approach
- stress the importance of your thesis statement
- give the essay a sense of completeness
- restate your thesis
- leave a final impression on the reader

CAUTION: Avoid overused phrases such as “In conclusion...” or “As you can see...”

End your paper with...

- **A brief restatement of your thesis after a summary of your main points.** This may be the best ending if your readers are unfamiliar with your subject or likely to be hard to convince.
Cars entice us Americans because they offer the ultimate mechanism for achieving individuality. Through the kind of car we drive and how we adorn it, we can really “be somebody” and proclaim to strangers our singular selves. We can dine a-la-car and sing aloud without seeming weird. Isolated in our climate controlled, stereophonic capsule, we can avoid direct human contact and concentrate full time on being individuals.
- **The only complete statement of your thesis, saved for the end.** This approach can have great dramatic force if your readers can follow the logic of everything leading up to it.
Today’s self-centered consumers demand cars that satisfy their craving for individuality.
- **A specific reference to the beginning or to the title**, which may round off the whole by “framing” it.
(Title: Cars R Us)_____ At the beginning of *Mother Night*, novelist Kurt Vonnegut observes, “We are what we pretend to be”---a condition made increasingly possible by the cars we choose to drive.
- **A redefinition of the meaning of a key term**, in light of what you have said in the main body of your paper, which can pinpoint your meaning for the reader.
The American Dream has taken on different meanings for different people, but its original meaning derived from a seemingly unlimited potential for growth. We now recognize, however, that the Dream does have a limit.
- **A suggested result or finding of significance that goes beyond the immediate scope of the paper.** This can show your readers the wider importance of your thesis.
In the interest of pursuing criminals, government too often sacrifices the privacy of innocent people, and new technology is making old laws obsolete. The invasion continues, and no one seems to know how to stop our world from fulfilling the prophecy of George Orwell’s 1984.
- **A rhetorical question, an exclamation, a challenging statement, or a direct appeal to your readers for action**, making them rethink your thesis and the whole paper.
Overall, the advantages of the breeder reactor seem immeasurable. Because it can produce more fuel than it uses, it will theoretically be an infinite source of energy. What other source promises so much for our long-range energy future.
- **An appropriate bit of narrative, a quoted remark, or a quotation from a well-known source that sums up or illustrates your main point**, may remain

longer in the reader's memory.

I agree with Ellen Goodman's assertion that there is "something malignant about some of the extremists who make a public virtue of their health." The cancer is in the superior attitudes of the "healthy elite"---an attitude that actually discourages exercise and healthy habits by making average people feel too intimidated and inferior even to begin a fitness program.

References

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Rorabacher, Louise. Assignments in Exposition: Introductions and Conclusions.New York. Harper & Row. 1982.

www.leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite.conclude.html

www.www4.wju/arc/handouts/intro_concl.html

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