

# Introductions and Conclusions

It is pretty much impossible to draft a perfect introduction, thesis statement or conclusion on your first try. Leave time to write, revise and edit, and you will create effective writing. It is also a good idea to get feedback from others; then you can be sure that your message and tone are clear.

## Introductions

An introduction is your only chance to make a good first impression on your reader, so it's very important to spend time drafting an effective one. It should identify what your paper will be about and grab the reader's attention. It may also include your thesis statement (see below).

Your introduction should:

- Focus the reader's attention on your subject and arouse curiosity
- Specify your topic
- Provide your thesis statement
- Be concise

Be aware that you do not have to draft the introduction first; that can actually make it more difficult. Many writers draft the introduction last to ensure that it reflects the content of the paper. This can also allow you to spend adequate time on all parts of the draft.

### Getting started:

Here are some suggestions for effective introductions from *The Handbook for Writers*, page 75.

Good Strategies	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide background</li><li>• Ask a question</li><li>• Relate an interesting story</li><li>• Use a vivid quotation</li><li>• Offer a surprising statistic</li><li>• Outline a problem or dilemma</li><li>• Define a word central to your subject</li><li>• Start with a general point and get more specific</li><li>• Challenge a commonly held idea</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose statements: "My paper will..."</li><li>• Apologies</li><li>• Clichés: "a day late and a dollar short," "Waste not, want not."</li><li>• Disregarding your instructor's preferences (use of questions, first and second person, tone, etc.)</li><li>• Extremes (too long or too short)</li><li>• An intro that does not match your paper</li></ul>

## Thesis Statements

Your thesis statement is the central message of your essay. It will state the subject and give the purpose of your paper. A thesis statement should narrow your subject to a single idea, claim something specific about your subject, convey your reason for writing, and preview the arrangement of your ideas.

Begin with a question about your topic. Spell out the answer to that question in a sentence.

**Question:** Do violent lyrics cause teenagers to commit violent acts?

**Answer:** Research shows that most violence in teenagers is caused by situations at home or mental/emotional disorders.

**Thesis statement:** While many people believe that violent lyrics cause teenagers to act out, research proves that violence is caused by living conditions or emotional disorders.

## Conclusions

A conclusion completes an essay and assures that readers have understood your purpose and ideas. A strong conclusion commonly restates your thesis in different words or from a fresh viewpoint. An effective conclusion will often echo the introduction, but will use a different strategy.

### Getting Started:

Here are some suggestions for effective conclusions from *The Handbook for Writers*, page 103.

Good Strategies	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summarize your essay’s main points</li><li>• A statement that urges awareness or action</li><li>• A statement that looks to the future or implications of the topic</li><li>• Relate or finish an interesting story</li><li>• Ask a thought provoking question</li><li>• Use a quotation to sum up the thesis</li><li>• Offer a surprising concluding statistic</li><li>• Outline a problem or dilemma</li><li>• Redefine a key term</li><li>• Make a recommendation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Announcing statements: “My paper has proven that...”</li><li>• Repeating the introduction</li><li>• Clichés: “a day late and a dollar short,” “Waste not, want not.”</li><li>• Disregarding your instructor’s preferences (use of questions, first and second person, tone, etc.)</li><li>• New ideas that were not covered in the paper</li><li>• Absolutes and sweeping generalizations</li><li>• Fallacies (flaws in logic)</li><li>• Apologies</li></ul>

## Essay Titles

A good title helps you stay focused while drafting and also tells your reader what to expect. It is more effective if it is interesting and easy to read. Here are some tips from *The Handbook for Writers*, page 54.

- Don’t write a title at the last minute – it will be obvious that you did not take your time. Write key words and ideas from the essay for brainstorming and then turn those into titles. Try to draft several and then choose the best one.
- Decide whether you want a direct title (clearly states topic of essay) or an indirect title (is mysterious about the topic).
- Avoid titles that are too broad (“Stem Cell Research”) or too narrow (“The Effects of Stem Cell Research on the U.S. Research Initiatives”).
- Don’t give away the whole essay in the title, but don’t be too vague either.