

Introductions and Conclusions

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

Introductions

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

An introduction should

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

Be aware that writers do not have to draft the introduction first; that can actually make the process more difficult. Many writers draft the introduction last to ensure that it reflects the content of the paper.

Getting started: Here are some suggestions for effective introductions.

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

Thesis Statements

According to *A Writer's Reference*, "An effective thesis statement is a central idea that conveys your purpose, or reason for writing, and that requires support." It must assert a debatable position; use clear, specific language; be focused without being too restrictive or too vague; and matter to your audience (the "so what? test") (8). Also, the thesis statement often indicates the order in which the evidence to prove your position will appear in the paper.

For checklists on how to write a thesis statement and models of thesis statements corresponding to various types of arguments, see also the Writing Center handouts "How to Write a Thesis Statement" and "Thesis Statement Types & Models." An exercise to guide you through writing a thesis statement can be found in *Writing Arguments A Rhetoric with Readings (29-30; 94-97)*. *The Norton Introduction to Literature: Shorter 13th Edition*, provides more detailed information and examples on writing thesis statements for literary analysis papers (1920-22).

You should begin with the central question to answer about the topic. Answer that question in a sentence. For example:

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.

For more information and examples, see *A Writer's Reference* (pp. 86-89).

Conclusions

A conclusion completes an essay and assures that readers have understood the writer's purpose and ideas. A strong conclusion commonly restates the 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. Similar and additional advice is located in *A Writer's Reference* (pp. 19-20, 64) and *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings* (18-19).

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

Essay Titles

A good title helps the writer stay focused while drafting and also tells the reader what to expect. Work to make a title both interesting and informative. Think: creative title + informative subtitle ("Jive'n and Survivin': The Poetry of Langston Hughes," for example). Writer should not write a title at the last minute—it will be obvious that the writer did not take time to think about what the essay is saying. 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.

- Give readers a sense of your argument rather than merely announcing some vague topic or just indicating "Essay 2" or not bothering to write a title at all.
- Decide whether to use a direct title (clearly states topic of essay), an indirect title (is mysterious about the topic), or a combination of both.
- Avoid titles that are too broad to truly clarify, comment on, or create interest about the subject of the particular essay/argument.