WRITING PROCESS

Introductions and Conclusions

“The introduction and conclusion to a paper can be understood as a type of transition. . . At the beginning of a paper, the introduction serves as a transition by moving the reader from the world outside of your paper to the world within. At the end of the paper, the conclusion works in the opposite direction by moving readers from the world of your paper back to their own world. . .” (Allyn and Bacon Handbook, 1999, p. 151)

Many people feel that the introduction is the first part of the paper they should write. After all, it does come first! The problem with this approach is that every single paper develops as it is drafted, revised, and edited. All you really need to get started is your thesis (see From Topic to Research Question to Thesis and Writing a Thesis Statement). After you have drafted your paper, you start thinking about ways to build an introduction around your thesis.

As for the conclusion, many people think it simply summarizes the paper’s main points. While a conclusion can have elements of summary, that is only one of its purposes. Honestly, there is little need to summarize everything in the paper. After all, your audience did just read the paper and it is not likely they will need to be reminded about everything again. Trust your audience to have some short-term memory. Remind them only of the big conclusions that you really want to stick with them.

A conclusion should also leave your audience thinking. When you see a really good movie, hours or even days later, you still can not shake it. A good conclusion should be like this (a good paper should be like this as well). Another way to think about a conclusion is to view it as the introduction to another paper, where you explore the topic further. A conclusion is a good place to note unanswered questions and to establish the direction you would take the research next. But more on that later.

Now, many people are taught that an introduction is much like an inverted triangle, and a conclusion is really just an introduction in reverse. Ring a bell?

![Inverted Triangle Diagram]

Picture an upside down triangle (one point at the bottom, flat at the top). When writing an introduction, you start with a really general statement (that is the broad flat top) then, you narrow gradually, until you have your "point"-your thesis. The conclusion is written in the reverse of the introduction (thesis first and then ending with a general statement). This is one way to write introductions and conclusions, and it is generally
the most basic way. This technique can be helpful while drafting the introduction or conclusion, but there are many more interesting and effective ways to write both of these sections. If you were previously told that this is the ONLY way to write introductions and conclusions, it is a myth.

Introduction

What is an introduction? What is its purpose?

Simply, it is a paragraph (or two) that introduces your paper’s topic to your reader and that grabs their attention and piques their interest so they will want to read the rest of your paper. There are two important things to note when writing your introduction: establish the topic AND make it interesting. We will look at these one at a time. All the sample introductions in this section were written by actual composition students here at Kaplan University.

Establishing the topic:
The introduction is a great place to give any necessary background or historical information, or to define unfamiliar terms.

"Grammer" or syntax (the linguistic term) is the study of the patterns and regularities of language at the word-to-sentence level. Its history can be traced back to the Greeks, 2000 years ago, through the Romans, and extends to present day. Importantly, grammar does not limit itself to what people say is grammatical. True grammar reflects the patterns that real speakers and writers actually use, including, even, their use of the word “ain’t.”.

This introduction gives a historical background, but it presents it in an interesting way.

Make it interesting!

First off, the theory that introductions must begin with a general statement is not a rule. An attention-grabbing introduction is a great way to start. Here are some techniques to make your introduction interesting:

Begin with a quotation: However, make sure to explain its relevance! A quotation with no explanation is not effective at all. The following is an example:

Example 1:  
"If I commit suicide, it will not be to destroy myself but to put myself back together again." (Antonin Artaud, 1925, p.37) It may sound strange to think of suicide as anything but self-destructive, but to many who have contemplated or committed suicide, as Artaud did, the notion that suicide will somehow heal them or put them back together is quite common. Obviously, suicide is self-destruction, but to prevent suicide, one must first understand what those who are suicidal feel it will fix. Only then can another path to putting oneself "back together again" be realistically offered.

Begin with a definition: The key to using a definition is to make sure you are defining something needing defining (see Using Facts, Examples, and Narrations). Do not throw in a definition that everyone knows.
Euthanasia is “the act or practice of ending the life of an individual suffering from a terminal illness or an incurable condition, as by lethal injection or the suspension of extraordinary medical treatment” (American Heritage Dictionary, 4th edition, 2000). While everyone can agree on what it is, there are deep divides over whether or not it is moral or ethical.

Now consider this definition:

Euthanasia is the act of ending a terminally ill person’s life mercifully. It allows people to control their own destiny by controlling their own death.

This second one is interesting because it is a definition that we would not find in a dictionary. It is a stipulative definition...part of the author's job is to support this definition of euthanasia. Why do you think the author gave this definition of euthanasia rather than a dictionary definition? Well, what is euthanasia considered in the legal world (in most of the U.S.)? Suicide or murder, at this point. Just looking at this definition, what do you think the author's stance on euthanasia will be? Note how the persuasion starts early. This definition sets up the paper's argument. The author is defining euthanasia as an act of mercy, and as a right. Stipulative definitions define concepts and arguments in such a way as to lead and convince the reader that the point the author is trying to make is reasonable and correct. So, in this example, the author is saying that euthanasia is mercy, not murder. The author wants you to see it in a positive way, and part of the author's job is to support this definition of euthanasia.

Begin with a question:

Echo, shampoo, window, balcony, hurricane, cruise, noodle, whiskey—these are all good English words, aren't they? Actually, they are now, but they are only a few of the tens of thousands of words that English has borrowed from other languages. In fact, English has borrowed and generated so many words that it has the largest vocabulary of any language on the planet. Just how many words it has cannot be determined are care, careless, and carelessness to be counted as one word or three? The range, however, is from 500,000 (the number of entries in the Oxford English Dictionary) to well over a million. To be fair, no individual English speaker has a vocabulary of this size depending on education and other factors, an individual's range is usually between 15,000 and 70,000 words yet it remains fascinating that English has gained most of its words by borrowing them from other languages.

Many teachers instruct students to stay away from introductions with questions. Why? What do you think about this one? Generally speaking, the question-filled introductions teachers would like you to avoid are ones like this:

What is global warming? Why is it important? This paper will tell you why.

What is effective about the questions in the English vocabulary example is that they immediately interest readers. They read the first question, and think the answer is yes, but then learn that these words in fact are borrowed from other languages.

Start with the opposite opinion: If you start your paper with an opinion opposite of the one you plan to take, you can knock out a counter-argument early on. Here is an example of this:

Animal research is cruel and unnecessary. Animals are subjected to treatments that can only be described as torture. They are also primarily used to test frivolous products like cosmetics. Animal research should be banned.
These are common sentiments, and emotions run high in discussions of this topic. That is why it is so crucial to understand exactly what the real standards, methods, and benefits of animal research are.

Note how the paper starts with an acknowledgement of how many people feel negatively about animal research, but then turns this into a discussion about why a clear understanding of the topic is necessary. This is a very effective introduction given the topic.

**Begin with a narrative:** If you begin with a very short narrative, or story that relates directly to your paper, be sure it is short, to the point, and relevant to your topic.

Sandra sat down on the coach and took a deep breath. She slowly put on her shoes, stood up, and reached for her purse. As she walked to the front door, her pulse grew rapid and she felt short of breath. She started to tremble. As her hand rested on the doorknob, a wave of panic washed over her. “I just can’t do it,” she thought. She stepped back from the door, defeated once again. Sandra, like thousands of other Americans, suffers from agoraphobia, an overwhelming and unnatural fear of being in public.

You can use this method to "frame" a paper - start the story in the introduction and end it in the conclusion.

**Begin with an interesting fact or startling information:** This information must be true and verifiable, and it doesn’t need to be totally new to your readers. It could simply be a pertinent fact that explicitly illustrates the point you wish to make:

Water conservation usually focuses on shortening the length of showers or reducing lawn watering, but according to the Worldwatch Institute’s senior researcher Alan Durning (1988), over half the water used in the United States is devoted to meat production.

**Begin with Dialogue:** You do not have to identify the speakers, but the reader must understand the point you are trying to convey. Use only a few exchanges between speakers to make your point.

“I hope the NFL is able to keep its eligibility requirements,” Meg said.

Alan replied, “Why do you say that?”

“Well, if the eligibility requirements are dropped, agents are going to be filling high school football stadiums scouting for new prospects, and convincing a lot of kids to forgo college in hopes of an NFL career. The bottom line is most won’t make it, and what will they have? No education, no job, and no hopes.”

Alan laughed, “You’re just a girl what do you know about football?”

Knowledge of and interest in sports is still stereotypically the domain of men, but recent studies have shown that women make up a large percentage of sports fans. Yet when women reveal this, they are ridiculed. This may also be why there is still opposition to the funding of women’s sports, and why many professional women’s sports leagues have faltered. Until society accepts that women can be great athletes and great fans, these stereotypical ideas, like those held by Alan, will persist.
If you are working on a paper now, think of your own topic. Pick one of the starting methods above and write the first one or two sentences of an introduction (this can be very rough...it is off-the-cuff, after all). This practice will help you generate several good ideas.

Conclusions

What is a Conclusion and its Purpose?

As mentioned above, the goal of a conclusion is not merely to restate everything you said in your paper. While longer papers benefit from conclusions that summarize all the main points, short paper conclusions which summarize serve little purpose. The audience remembers the points. Conclusions should always reinforce the main point, the thesis, but should do so in a way that does not simply repeat it.

Beyond a restatement of the thesis, many of the introductory techniques mentioned above also work well in conclusions. In addition, effective conclusions often do one or more of the following:

They mirror or complete the introduction:
Recall the narrative introduction about Sandra, the agoraphobic woman who was too afraid to leave her own home? When the introduction left off, she was backing away from the front door, unable to work up the courage to go out. The conclusion could revisit Sandra after she has received treatment. It could show how much happier she is with this phobia behind her.

They challenge the audience to take action from what they have learned: In this case, the author has written a paper on poor parental conduct at their children’s sporting events and the effect this has on children. In the conclusion, she puts the responsibility on the audience by suggesting parents need to take responsibility for their own behavior and make youth sports positive again:

Parents across the United States need to let go of their own agendas, and athletic associations need to enforce parental and coaching codes of conduct through classes and training. As a result, the world of youth sports can be returned to the children where they can all learn to enjoy a sport, learn the skills of a sport, play, and most of all have fun.

They bring up remaining questions: There are several ways to use this technique. You can suggest answers to the questions or you can propose further research that would answer those questions. You can also use this technique to minimize the importance of questions that may be lingering in the minds of your audience. The following conclusion uses questions to accomplish this:

With the rising price of, growing demand for, and lessening supply of gasoline, is the only solution to reinvent the automobile? Is the next new technology just around the corner, ready to solve this problem? While new technologies will shape the future, and while the current automobile is likely to become obsolete in the decades to come, there is a great deal we can do today far short of abandoning our cars. We can buy more fuel-efficient vehicles. When we buy a home or rent an apartment, we can try to find one within walking distance to a grocery store. We can carpool to work or take public transportation. We can even talk to our employers about setting up a staggered work schedule: cars burn the most gasoline and create the most pollution when driving in heavy traffic. Workers who are allowed to start work two hours earlier or two hours later to avoid rush-hour congestion can save gasoline. Regardless of what we do now, or what innovation brings, conserving gasoline now makes sense.