

LBCC Writing Center: How to Craft an Intro and Conclusion

The Introduction

The introduction is the opening passage of a paper. A typical introduction includes a “hook” to catch the reader’s interest, necessary background information, context for the topic, and a thesis statement.

Create the “hook”:

- Consider your audience. Who are you writing for? What will get them interested in your topic?
- Try starting out with a question or use a shocking, fun, or fascinating fact about your topic to open with—something that will get your reader’s interest right away.

Provide background information and context for your topic:

- What does your reader already know? What do they need to know in order to be on the same page as you in understanding these ideas?
- What is at stake? Why does this topic matter, and who is affected by it?

Write a strong thesis statement:

- If the word “thesis” seems overwhelming, try thinking of it as the “heart” or main point of your essay. A thesis is the guiding idea that creates a road map for your paper.
- What question are you addressing in your paper? The answer to this question could be your thesis. For example, if your question is “Why should drivers’ use of cell phones be banned?” the thesis might be “Drivers’ use of cell phones should be outlawed because people who talk and drive at the same time cause accidents.”
- The thesis usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of your essay. However, sometimes introductions can be longer than one paragraph and the thesis may appear in the second or third paragraph (especially if the introduction starts out with a creative story).
- In narrative writing, a thesis may be more informal and subtler than in a research paper.

Put it all together:

- If you get stuck on writing your introduction first, try writing it last instead. It can often be easier to write an introduction once you already know what your paper is about—after all, how do you know what you plan to say until you try saying it?
- Often, the main point of your paper may change as you learn more about your topic and explore your ideas. Revise your thesis and introduction after writing the first draft to make sure it is still relevant and focused.
- Try asking a friend to read your introduction. Have them explain what they expect the paper to be about based on just the introduction. Ask which sentence the thesis is, and see if they can identify it correctly.

Example of a strong introduction (thesis underlined):

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

Why is it strong?

- The introduction draws us in because the description is effective; the tone is that of one who is “entranced,” and this provides an engaging “hook.”
- Not only is the thesis statement clear, but necessary background information is present, such as where the essay is set (Disneyland).

The Conclusion

The conclusion is the last paragraph in a paper, and its job is to transition from the body paragraphs, remind the reader of important main points, and leave the reader with a final impression (often based on the significance of what you have presented). An introduction and conclusion act like “book ends” for an essay; when done well, they work together. A strong conclusion may end with a similar image, thought, or idea as the introduction.

Transition from the body paragraphs to the conclusion:

- How does your paper prepare the reader for your conclusion? What is the one thing you are building up to? (Usually, this will be your thesis written again--but in different words.)
- Sometimes, a good transition starts in the last body paragraph. Does this last paragraph sound like it is “winding down” into the conclusion, or does it end abruptly?

Sum up your ideas:

- What are the main points you address in your essay? Briefly touch on these one more time before ending the paper.
- Restate your thesis in the conclusion--but not word for word. You want to capture the idea of your thesis, but in a different shape.

Leave the reader with a final impression:

- Consider the subject and type of paper you are writing. For example, in a science paper you might summarize and analyze the research that has been done in a particular area. In your conclusion, you might recommend that further research is needed because the data is not conclusive. If you are writing about a social issue, your conclusion might be a call to action.
- What will keep the reader thinking about this topic? Sometimes a reminder of the importance of your subject matter can accomplish this (who does it affect?). “Why should my audience care?” is a good question to ask yourself.

Put it all together:

- Sometimes, in a first draft, you may end up with a stronger thesis statement by the time you get to your conclusion than you originally had in your introduction. If this happens, go back to your introduction and revise your thesis accordingly.
- Re-read your conclusion to make sure you are not introducing any new ideas. If you are, these new ideas may deserve their own body paragraph—or maybe they need to be cut. Remember, conclusions exist to sum up your thoughts and keep the reader thinking about the topic, not to cram in more information.

Example of a strong conclusion (with restated thesis underlined):

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 a.m., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents’ arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

Why is it strong?

- The language and tone of the conclusion is consistent with the introduction, but notice it is the close of the day spent in Disneyland as contrasted to the beginning of the day.
- The author does not repeat the phrase, “Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.” Instead, he finds a new way to write the same thesis: “But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.”

Example source: Holewa, Randa. "Strategies for Writing a Conclusion." LEO. St. Cloud University, 2004, leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html.

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