



Introductions and Conclusions

Introduction

What is the purpose of an introduction in the Humanities field?

- An introduction is often compared to a funnel that begins broadly by contextualizing the topic and then narrows down to the thesis statement. It gives the reader a first impression of the paper and often tells the reader what question or issue the paper is attempting to resolve and/or negotiate.
- Sometimes, but not often, an introduction can be more than one paragraph.

An ideal introduction will incorporate some or all of these goals:

- Define the topic (issue, question, or problem) and why it matters.
- Show method of approach to topic.
- Provide necessary background information or context.
- State the thesis the paper will develop.

Some Possible Ways to Begin:

- Begin with questions that will be answered.
- Contrast two different views/aspects of a topic.
- Describe an experience related to the topic.
- Start with a narrative to set the scene.
- State the counterargument before leading to your own.
- Give a brief summary of the text or event.

How much information should I give up front?

- How much can I assume my readers know about my subject?
- Which parts of the research and/or the background are important enough to include in an introduction?
- Should I present an “open thesis,” which tells my reader only my position on a topic, or a “closed thesis,” which tells my reader both my position and the reason why?
- Which are essential parts of my plan or road map to include?

Here are some ways to know if you are doing too much in the introduction:

1) Are you digressing?

- Providing too much background
- Starting at a point too far away from the paper's immediate concerns ex. "Since the beginning of time..."
- Assuming your readers know nothing about the subject

2) Is the introduction incoherent?

- Trying to preview too much of the paper's conclusion before points are laid out
- Making few or no connections between sentences
- Covering too many areas at once

3) Are you prejudging?

- Appearing to have already settled the question posed in your paper

Conclusions

What is the purpose of a conclusion?

- The conclusion leaves the reader with the information and/or impact that the writer wants; it is often what the reader remembers most by providing the final discharge of energy that the paper has built up. It is the writer's last chance to convince the reader. A conclusion often suggests larger implications now that the evidence has been presented.

Strategies for writing effective conclusions:

- Make a useful analogy or comparison.
- Suggest specific actions that the reader should take in light of the information you've provided.
- Speculate about what your thesis implies for the future.
- Make a brief remark that sums up your feelings.

An ideal conclusion will incorporate some or all of these goals:

Note: Always be mindful that different disciplines have different academic conventions, but they are all looking for the same three basic things in a conclusion in varying degrees: judgment, culmination, and send-off.

- *Judgment*—Since the conclusion appears at the end of the paper, it is an appropriate place for the writer to state any judgment that stems from the issues the paper has brought up. It often connects with the introduction and repeats key terms. Also, it can revisit why the topic matters.
- *Culmination*—The conclusion is where everything should come together. It should not merely summarize; it should "ascend to one final statement of your thinking" (Rosenwasser and Stephen 201).
- *Send-Off*—The judgment and the culmination should form the basis of the send-off. This point is where the writer can draw broader conclusions.

Typical problems in conclusions:

- The mirror image (the most common problem)—the writer merely repeats the thesis and summarizes the main points—a dull and mechanical conclusion.
- The unnecessary summary—only lengthy, complex papers need a conclusion that summarizes the material covered in the paper. Otherwise, just a brief recap of the paper's main points will suffice.
- The empty cliché—"So ends the analysis of myself and the question of who am I has been answered in a brief form."
- The unnecessary announcement—"And in conclusion, let me say...."
- The trite truism—"And as for the future, only time will tell."
- The wastebasket ending—do not try in the final paragraph to say everything you didn't have room for in the body of the paper.
- The fade-out—"Researchers have so much more to discover in this area. Whatever we say now will be superseded in the near future."
- The wild surmise—"From this we see the utter futility of ever trying to help another person."