



WRITING CENTER

Introductions and Conclusions

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INTRODUCTIONS

All writing must begin somewhere. For the writer, the introduction can be difficult; the blank page appears so formidable, and the actual opening of a paper may *not* be the best way to start writing. In fact, many writers write the introduction *after* they have drafted the rest of the paper.

WHY ARE INTRODUCTIONS SO IMPORTANT?

An introduction is the writer's first contact with the audience. A writer must address the audience's needs and interests so they will continue to read the paper.

An introduction must have a clear purpose, and it must promise an interesting and informative experience. The introduction must be among the most engaging material of the paper.

The introduction has three parts:

1. The **Hook**: Grab the reader's attention in the first sentence or two. The hook should be about twenty words or so.
2. The **Lead**: The next few sentences develop the idea of the hook, maintain audience interest, and lead into or prepare for the final sentence of the introduction.
3. The **Thesis**: This is often the last sentence of the introduction. The thesis clearly identifies the topic; states the writer's position on, or purpose of, the topic; and indicates how the paper will develop.



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ADVICE ON WRITING INTRODUCTIONS

- Avoid promising more than you will deliver in the paper.
- Avoid announcing yourself: "I am going to..."; "The purpose of this essay..."; "After reading this paper you will..."
- Avoid dictionary definitions, unless you create an original definition of your own.

INTRODUCTION IDEAS

The following introduction ideas can be adapted to most of your papers. Keep your audience in mind; hook their interest and lead them to your thesis. Be brief and sharply focused.

1. Describe the person or group likely to find value in reading about the topic.
2. Describe the place associated with your topic.
3. Raise one or more questions about your topic, questions you are prepared to answer.
4. List one or more reasons your topic is important and worth your reader's time.
5. Explain how you became interested in the topic.
6. Review what most readers already know about the topic. Make sure you indicate that your paper is going to develop new ideas.
7. Present a surprising or startling statistic or fact about your topic.
8. Show how your topic is misunderstood, neglected, or overlooked because it has been the object of prejudice, lack of study, or confusion.
9. Show how your topic, which may seem to be common and uninteresting, is actually an intriguing and unique one.

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THREE SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS—EACH RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS, YET EACH IS AN APPROPRIATE OPENING FOR THE SAME PAPER

Introduction One

Want to insult someone's intelligence? Then **tell** them that running is good for them. **Explain** how running improves cardiovascular function. **Demonstrate** with statistics how runners have fewer heart attacks and fewer nervous breakdowns. **Keep** this up and you may receive a polite "Yes, I know, but I don't enjoy running." The surprising part is that running need not be a bore or even an unpleasant task.

Note: Beginning with a question is effective if it is followed with answers that offer active-verb suggestions. This technique offers an immediate opening to development, and transitions well to the second paragraph.

Introduction Two

A famous television commercial spotlights a young boy who discovers his breakfast cereal tastes good, even though it is good for him. Mikey "likes it!" The success of that commercial lies in the common assumption that products or activities good for us are usually not enjoyable. This is especially true of novice runners. They know running is good for them, but they find running a bore. The surprising fact is running can be so interesting and pleasant that we would continue even if it was not so good for us!

Note: Beginning with an audience's familiarity with a popular subject or topic is often an effective attention-grabber. This technique also provides a good opportunity to lead into the next paragraph with appealing words—*interesting and pleasant*—that hint at the first suggestion of support.

Introduction Three

They start out with great expectations. After a few weeks—in some cases, just a few days—they dread it. The daily run. They come up with some good excuses. "I'm too tired." "I've got too much work to do." "It's too hot." "It's too cold." "I'd rather do something enjoyable." Sound familiar? Most novice runners do not know how to enjoy the running experience. And that is the easy part.

Note: Beginning with an ambiguous pronoun is effective because it raises the "who and what" question. It then quickly moves to what *seems* to be the opposite of the paper's thesis, leading the audience into the first structured support.

CONCLUSIONS

Know when to quit! A sentence or two will do for shorter papers, and even three-or-four-page papers require only a few sentences. Readers like a tight, concise, and useful ending.

Although a restatement of the thesis can conclude a paper, the following ideas give the audience something new and fresh to think about. Keep in mind that the conclusion should leave a powerful impact on the audience.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

1. Conclude with a question, one that either you or your reader should, or needs to, answer.
2. Conclude with what you (or the reader) plan to, or should do, next.
3. Conclude with a call for action, something either the reader or a group should do.
4. Declare your willingness to become involved, by helping, planning, listening, etc.
5. Conclude with a prediction. Describe what will happen if present conditions are not changed. Or describe the results of following your recommendations.
6. Describe how you or the reader is better off for having explored this topic.
7. Underscore the relative ease of solving the problem, performing the skill, or understanding the concept.
8. Comment on your personal motives for writing the paper.
9. List other settings, groups, or areas of human endeavor that are or could be affected by the topic.
10. Create a sharply focused descriptive image: a parting picture to leave with the reader.