



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

## INTRODUCTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Introductions and conclusions are vital to any paper you write. Introductions are the “start,” often used to gain the reader’s interest, welcome the reader to a new topic or subject, and provide the most important element of a paper: the thesis. On the other hand, conclusions are the “finish,” the last chance to stress the main idea, give the essay a sense of completion, and leave a final impression on the reader. This handout reviews some strategies for writing *both* introductions and conclusions.

### Introductions: The Hook



Figure 2 A drawing of a hook

Before writing your introduction, it is important to understand your assignment or writing prompt:

- Make sure you read the assignment carefully
- Underline key words and/or requirements
- Restate or summarize the assignment in your own words

As stated above, the introduction’s largest goal is to create and gain the reader’s interest in the topic or subject being discussed. In writing, an introduction begins with a “hook” or an “attention getter,” that is based upon the idea that the reader continues asking him or herself, “What is this?”/“Why am I reading?”/“So What?”/“What should I do about it?”

When it comes to gaining and keeping the reader's interest, there are a few different techniques that can be used in introductions. The chart below illustrates the technique, its definition, and an example:

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
<i>A Real Life Story or Narrative</i>	Using a real life story will not only get the reader to relate to but to empathize on a subject.	For instance, one could use a childhood experience in a paper about the transition from adolescence to adulthood.
<i>A Rhetorical Question</i>	Rhetorical questions are used to arouse interest without requiring an answer. Either the answer is obvious, or it will keep the reader's curiosity until you provide it.	"If gun control laws remain as lenient as they are, how can we expect our children to be safe?"
<i>A Quotation</i>	A quotation from a celebrity or expert not only grabs the audience's attention, but also reinforces your point.	"If practice makes perfect, and no one's perfect, then why practice?" – musician Billy Corgan
<i>An Unusual Statement</i>	By providing something that your audience has never read before, you can be sure that the eyes of your readers are fixed on your topic.	If you were writing a paper on Rene Descartes' beliefs regarding existence, a statement such as "What if I were to tell you that everything you hold to be true is not real?" would probably catch the reader's attention.
<i>Humor</i>	Using tasteful humor is another great way to gain the reader's interest. A joke relevant to the main topic can be a surprisingly effective way of making the reader interested.	An appropriate joke for a paper on weather in the Pacific Northwest would be, "If I had a dollar for every time it rained, I could afford to live somewhere nicer."

<i>A Shocking Statistic</i>	In terms of results, statistics are much like quotations. They quickly capture the reader's interest and support the main topic.	For example, "Only 55% of Americans know that the Sun is a star."
-----------------------------	--	---

Although introductions are used to gain reader **interest**, they also provide essential information about the topic's **background**, identify the **main idea**, and **preview** or set the stage for the paper. Introductions also serve as the means for a writer to "**enter the academic conversation**" being held about that particular topic or subject. Lastly, the introduction serves as the place for writers to layout their argument clearly and concisely in what is known as the **thesis statement**.

There are many ways to enter the academic conversation, but the key is to start with what "they" say first, and then respond. Listed below are some examples:

**A. Start with what "they" say about the subject.**

- Americans today tend to believe that \_\_\_\_\_.
- It is often said that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Many people assume that \_\_\_\_\_.
- In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been \_\_\_\_\_. On one hand, \_\_\_\_\_ argues \_\_\_\_\_. On the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_ contends \_\_\_\_\_.

**B. Respond in one of three ways.**

*b1. Yes – Or, agreeing with a difference*

- X is surely right about \_\_\_\_\_ because, as he/she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's theory of \_\_\_\_\_ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Scientists agree that \_\_\_\_\_, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe \_\_\_\_\_.

*b2. No – Or, disagreeing with reasons*

- X is mistaken because he/she overlooks \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's claim that \_\_\_\_\_ rests upon the questionable assumption that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's view is mistaken about \_\_\_\_\_ because, as recent research (personal experience) has shown, \_\_\_\_\_.
- By focusing on \_\_\_\_\_, X overlooks the deeper problem of \_\_\_\_\_.
- X claims \_\_\_\_\_, but we don't need him/her to tell us that. Anyone familiar with \_\_\_\_\_ has long known that \_\_\_\_\_.

*b3. Yes, but – Or, agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously*

- Although many agree with X to a point, his/her overall conclusion is false that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Although people disagree with much of what X says, his/her final conclusion is consistent that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Though many concede that \_\_\_\_\_, it is wrong to conclude that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X is right that \_\_\_\_\_, but she seems to be on more dubious ground when she/he states \_\_\_\_\_.

\*For more information about “entering the academic conversation,” or for more template examples, please reference *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Persuasive Writing* by Gerald Graff.

One can use an upside down triangle in order to illustrate the body of an introduction:

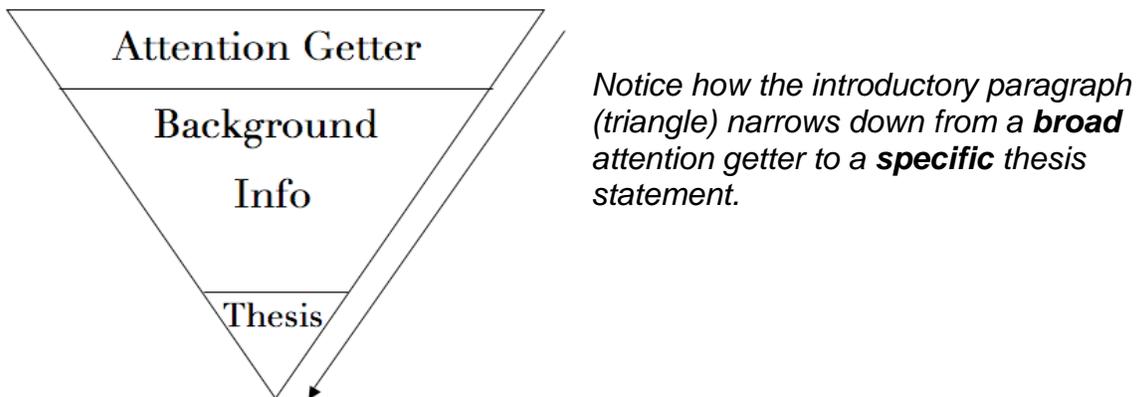


Figure 3 Image of an introduction format

### The Thesis Statement:

It is important to recognize exactly what the term “thesis statement” means. A thesis statement is simply the point of an essay. In other words, the thesis is your **main idea** or the position you want to *prove* in your essay. When it comes to developing a thesis, first, it is important to understand the goal of your writing assignment:

1. The **expository** or **explanatory paper** explains something to the audience. The formula for an expository paper’s thesis is the same as the analytical paper’s thesis, but you can speak to just one point: **X is Y**.

*Ex: The planet is polluted.*

2. There is the **analytical paper** that breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents the breakdown and evaluation to the audience. A thesis formula for an analytical paper might look like this: **X is Y because of 1, 2, and 3**.

*Ex: The planet is polluted because of the emission of oil, trash, and e-waste.*

3. Finally, the **argumentative paper** makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided. The formula for this type of paper derives from the analytical paper. **X should be Y because of 1, 2, and 3.**

*Ex: The emission of oil, trash, and e-waste should be significantly reduced because it pollutes the planet.*

\* For more information (or examples) on thesis writing, please refer to the Thesis Statement handout available in the Writing Center.

### Introduction Checklist

- **Did you create interest in the topic for your reader(s)?**
- **Did you include brief background information about the topic of your thesis?**
- **Did your thesis statement cover all the topics that will be discussed in the body paragraphs?**
- **Did you state your thesis clearly at the end of the paragraph?**

Once you have an introduction and a thesis, you can move on to writing body paragraphs. One of the benefits of creating a well-formulated thesis is that it directs your paper in structure and content. If you are writing the standard five-paragraph essay, the first paragraph will be the introduction, and the last one will be the conclusion, which leaves three paragraphs to fill.

Looking at the example, “*The planet is polluted because of the emission of oil, trash, and e-waste,*” one can see that there are three topics that can be

designated to their own paragraphs. (Body 1 = Oil; Body 2 = Trash; Body 3 = E-Waste)

Body paragraphs work in the opposite way of introduction paragraphs: They go from something *narrow* - a specific **Topic Sentence** (similar to a thesis statement because it dictates what will be covered inside the paragraph) - to more *broad* information. In the instance of the examples above, the first body paragraph and topic sentence would be about oil, the second about trash, and so on. Once you have written your body paragraphs, you can move on to the conclusion.

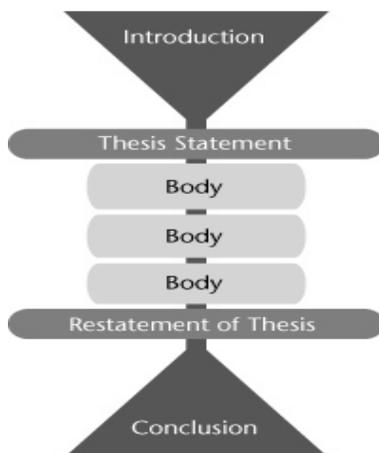
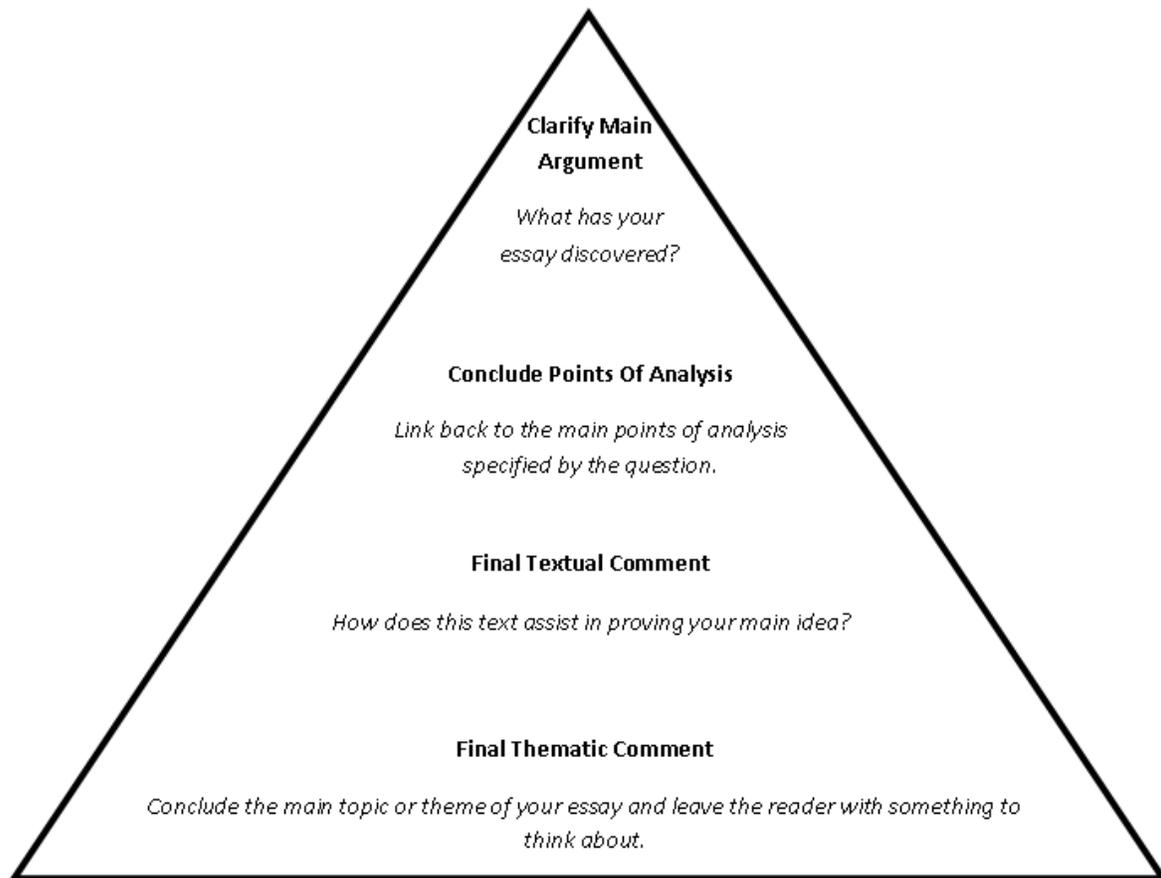


Figure 4 Diagram of the 5 paragraph structure

**Conclusions:** To reiterate, conclusions are the last place to show the significance and meaning of your paper. You may want to use the first sentence to give the reader a last general look at the topic or a brief rundown of what you have explained so far. In other words, you are re-stating the thesis, but remember to try not to use the same vocabulary used in the thesis of the introduction – paraphrase or summarize the point. **The conclusion contains no new ideas or information;** thus, the purpose of the conclusion is to concisely summarize your findings and take a broad view of their importance.



**Figure 5 Diagram of a conclusion**

The conclusion is also the last place to answer any questions, *perhaps the rhetorical one you may have used in your introduction*, and it is where you can include your own opinion. This is where papers can differ the most because you could end with a recommendation or the larger implications associated with the issue. What do you think the reader should do? What is the larger and broader significance of this issue? For example, if you are writing about the importance of recycling, how could someone who doesn't recycle start? Or, how could this action impact the world?

## Conclusion Checklist

- Did you answer any questions asked in the introduction?
- Did you remember to exclude any new ideas or previously unstated information?
- Did you summarize your main points and relate them to your rephrased thesis?

### Exercises:

#### **Exercise 1**

Match the thesis statements below with the correct type of introductory paragraph.

A. Economists have hypothesized that the 2008 Recession was a result of federal overspending, emigration of illegal immigrants, and overproduction of goods.

B. One should shop at Walgreen's instead of CVS because they offer a wider selection of goods, lower prices, and friendlier customer service.

C. Although getting in shape can seem difficult, it can be done through proper diet and exercise.

Expository: \_\_\_\_\_

Analytical: \_\_\_\_\_

Argumentative: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Exercise 2**

Create a thesis statement for the following introduction paragraph:

Education has always been thought of as a first-class ticket to the middle class. Due to recent economic problems, many college graduates are reportedly struggling to find employment consistent with the degrees they received. This has sparked many debates on whether or not college is worth all the money and effort that it requires.

---

---

---

---

---

### Exercise 3

Based on the following conclusion, choose the correct essay topic.

In conclusion, there have been multiple sources of credible information supporting the notion that global warming is a legitimate issue for the planet. The problem is nearly impossible to ignore with rises in temperature, hurricane frequency, and carbon dioxide concentrations. In order to prevent the absolute devastation of the environment, members of society must learn to be self-aware of the impact they have on their planet and work to resolve the issue of global warming.

- A. Why Global warming is a myth
- B. Global warming in popular culture
- C. The problem of global warming and how it can be resolved

\*\*\*References for Handout:

- Brizee, Allen. "Introductions, Body Paragraphs, and Conclusions for Exploratory Papers." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 21 Feb 2013. Web. 11 June 2013.
- Cooley, Thomas. *Back to the Lake: A Reader for Writers*. New York, NY. W.W. Norton & Company. 2009. Print.
- Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. "They Say / I Say:" *The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. Print.
- Tardiff, Elyssa and Allen Brizee. "Tips and Examples for Writing Thesis Statements." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 21 Feb 2013. Web. 11 June 2013.
- Wells, Jaclyn M. "Conclusions." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. Ed. Allen Brizee. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 22 Mar 2013. Web. 11 June 2013.