

Introductions and Conclusions

The introduction draws readers into the writer’s world and into her or his point of view. The first few sentences are important in creating a strong first impression. Here are several options to try. Be sure that the one you choose is appropriate to your subject:

Ask a question or series of related questions.	Relate an incident or anecdote.
Use a vivid quotation.	Outline the argument your thesis refutes.
Use a visual image that represents your subject.	Make an historical comparison or contrast.
Offer a surprising fact.	Outline a problem or dilemma.
Provide background.	Define a word central to your thesis.
Use statistics.	State an opinion related to your thesis.

Here are some things to avoid. Don’t:

Reach too far back with generalities: “Throughout human history. . .,” or “In today’s society. . . .”	Start with “The purpose of my essay is. . .” or “In this essay, I will”
Refer back to the title of your essay in the first few sentences.	Start with “According to Webster’s. . .” or a similar phrase leading to a dictionary definition. This kind of lead is overused.
Apologize for your opinion or your lack of knowledge.	Be too complicated. The introduction should be simple and concise.

The conclusion finishes your essay and answers the “So what?” question. There are two broad types of conclusions—those that “look backward” into the paper, and those that “look forward.”

Looking backward:

Echo the approach of the introduction or return to the lead sentence.	Summarize the key points.
Restate and <u>amplify</u> the thesis.	Use an especially compelling example.

Looking forward:

Call for action on your topic.	Relate the subject to the future—speculate.
Recommend a specific course of action.	Strike a note of hope (perhaps for change).

Be careful to avoid the following in your conclusion. Don’t:

Simply restate your thesis!	Start off in a completely new direction.
Assert more than you reasonably can based on your evidence.	Apologize for your essay or otherwise cast doubt on the point you are making.

This handout was created by tutor Eric Buswell. For more information, consult *The Prentice Hall Reference Guide* by Muriel Harris and Jennifer Kunka and *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 4th edition.