

7. Begin with an Unusual Comparison

Using an unexpected comparison is a good way to draw readers into an essay. As the following example shows, introducing an essay with an unusual comparison can provide a humorous context for a discussion.

Your body is like a superbly engineered luxury automobile: if you use it wisely and maintain it properly, it will eventually break down, most likely in a bad neighborhood. To understand why this is, let's take a look inside this fascinating "machine" we call the human body.

Dave Barry, "How Your Body Works"

8. Begin with a Quotation

An appropriate saying or an interesting piece of dialogue can immediately draw readers into your essay. Notice how the quotation below not only creates interest but also leads smoothly and logically into the thesis statement at the end of the introduction.

According to the comedian Jerry Seinfeld, "When you're single, you are the dictator of your own life. . . . When you're married, you are part of a vast decision-making body." In other words, before you can do anything, you have to discuss it with someone else. These words kept going through my mind as I thought about asking my girlfriend to marry me. The more I thought about Seinfeld's words, the more I hesitated. Unfortunately, I never suspected I would pay a price for my indecision.

Dan Brody (student)

▶ FOCUS ON TITLES ◀

Every essay you write should have a **title**. Like an introduction, a title should suggest the subject of your essay and make people want to read further.

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- A title can be a straightforward announcement.
How Your Body Works
- A title can be a question.
Is a Tree Worth a Life?
- A title can be an announcement of a controversial position.
The Case against Animal Testing
- A title can establish a personal connection with readers.
Animal Tests Saved My Life
- A title can establish an unusual slant or perspective.
Showering with Your Dog

PRACTICE 5-1

Look back at the essay you wrote for Practice 4-8 or any other essay you are currently working on. Evaluate your opening paragraph. Is it suitable for your topic and thesis? Is it likely to interest readers? Try drafting a different opening paragraph, using one of the options presented in this chapter. Be sure to include a clear statement of your thesis. In what ways, if any, is this new opening paragraph an improvement?

Now, think about your title. Brainstorm to come up with one that will get your readers' attention.

B CONCLUSIONS

Because your **conclusion** is the last thing readers see, they may judge your entire essay by the effectiveness of the conclusion. For this reason, conclusions should be planned, drafted, and revised with care. Like an introduc-

FOCUS ON CONCLUSIONS <

In essay exams—when time is limited—a one-sentence restatement of your thesis is often enough for a conclusion. Likewise, an in-class essay exam may have just a one- or two-sentence introduction. (See Appendix A, “Writing Essays and Paragraphs in an Exam Setting.”)

tion, a conclusion is usually a full paragraph. (Long essays may have a conclusion that is several paragraphs long.)

Your conclusion should give readers a sense of completion. One way you can accomplish this is by restating the essay's thesis. Keep in mind, however, that a conclusion is more than a word-for-word restatement of the thesis. If you return to your thesis here, you should rephrase it, expand upon it, go on to make some general concluding remarks, and end with a sentence that readers will remember.

FOCUS ON CONCLUSIONS

Familiar phrases that announce your essay is coming to a close—for example, *in summary* or *in conclusion*—are unnecessary and can be annoying. Try to avoid them. Also, avoid words and phrases that weaken your readers' confidence in you, such as *I may not be an expert*, *at least that's my opinion*, and *I could be wrong, but*.

Here are some options you can try when you write your conclusions.

1. Conclude with a Restatement of Your Thesis

This no-nonsense conclusion allows you to reinforce your points by restating your thesis in different words. Notice how the following essay ends by simply reviewing the main points of the argument.

In 1994, voters' concerns about high taxes, increased welfare costs, and the huge national debt helped propel the Republicans into the House and the Senate. Republican candidates used these issues to exploit the public's distrust of government. For their part, voters did not seem to care that taxes were not as high as they were in the 1960s and 1970s, that welfare costs were a small part of federal spending, and that the national debt was lower than it had been just two years before.

Serge Komanawski (student)

2. Conclude with a Narrative

A narrative conclusion can bring a situation or event discussed in the essay to a logical, satisfying close. The conclusion below uses a narrative to tie up the essay's loose ends.

After twenty years, the tree began to bear. Although Grandfather complained about how much he lost because pollen never reached the poor part of town, because at the market he had to haggle over the price of avocados, he loved that tree. It grew, as did his family, and when he died, all his sons standing on each other's shoulders, oldest to youngest, could not reach the highest branches. The wind could move the branches, but the trunk, thicker than any waist, hugged the ground.

Gary Soto, "The Grandfather"

3. Conclude with a Question

By ending with a question, you leave readers with something to think about. The question you ask should build on the thesis statement and not introduce any new issues. Notice how the conclusion below asks a series of questions before restating the essay's thesis.

Why is it that when the sun or the moon or the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible, and that when I wind up my watch, I start it, but when I wind up this essay, I shall end it?

English is a crazy language.

Richard Lederer, "English Is a Crazy Language"

4. Conclude with a Prediction

This type of conclusion not only sums up the main point of the essay but also goes a step farther and makes a statement about the future. The following conclusion uses this technique to paint a troubling picture of the future of American cities.

On that little street were the ghosts of the people who brought me into being and the flesh-and-blood kids who will be my children's companions in the twenty-first century. You could tell by their eyes that they couldn't figure out why I was there. They were accustomed to being ignored, even by the people who had once populated their rooms. And as long as that continues, our cities will burst and burn, burst and burn, over and over again.

Anna Quindlen, "The Old Block"

5. Conclude with a Recommendation

Once you think you have convinced readers that a problem exists, you can make recommendations about how the problem should be solved. Notice how the following paragraph makes a series of recommendations about a cancer drug made from the Pacific yew tree.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the yew tree is made available for the continued research and development of taxol. Environmental groups, the timber industry, and the Forest Service must recognize that the most important value of the Pacific yew is as a treatment for cancer. At the same time, its harvest can be managed in a way that allows for the production of taxol without endangering the continual survival of the yew tree.

Sally Thane Christensen, "Is a Tree Worth a Life?"

6. Conclude with a Quotation

Frequently a well-chosen quotation—even a brief one—can add a lot to your essay. In some cases, a quotation can add authority to your ideas. In others, as in the paragraph below, the quotation can sum up the main point of the essay.

It was 4:25 A.M. when the ambulance arrived to take the body of Miss Genovese. It drove off. "Then," a solemn police detective said, "the people came out."

Martin Gansberg, "38 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police"

FOCUS ON INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ◀

The content of your introductions and conclusions depends on the points you make in the body of your essay. For this reason, it makes little sense to spend much time writing introductions or conclusions until you have drafted the body paragraphs. Once you see the direction in which your essay has developed, you can concentrate on revising your introductions and conclusions so they are consistent with what you say in the body of your essay.