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ENGLISH 3102  
Prof. W. Morciglio

# Introductions and Conclusions

**Overview**

In this chapter you will learn

- To write effective introductions for essays
- To choose appropriate titles for essays
- To write effective conclusions for essays

## A INTRODUCTIONS

An **introduction** is the first thing people see when they read your essay. If the introduction is interesting and effective, readers are likely to be drawn into your essay. If it isn't, they may be bored or even form a negative impression.

Your introduction should prepare readers for the essay to follow by giving them the information they need to understand your discussion. For this reason, the introduction should include a **thesis statement** that presents the main idea of your essay. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the introduction, but it can also appear earlier.

In addition to containing the thesis statement, the introduction should make people want to read further. To heighten reader interest, it can begin with a question or a narrative or even an unusual comparison. Because the introduction has so many functions to perform, it should be a full paragraph. (In long essays, in fact, the introduction may be several paragraphs. In such cases, the thesis statement may not appear until the second or third paragraph.)

**FOCUS ON INTRODUCTIONS**

Don't begin your essays by announcing what you plan to write about. Instead, begin with an introduction that is a part of your essay and flows naturally into the rest of it, and avoid unnecessary statements like *This essay is about*, *Today I will talk about*, or *In my essay I will discuss*.

From: Windows on Writing: Practice in Context<sup>106</sup>  
Laurie G. Kirszner & Stephen D. Mandell

The following options can help you write varied and interesting introductions.

### 1. Begin with a Direct Approach

Quite often the best way to open an essay is by presenting a few opening remarks and then listing the points you will discuss in your essay. This straightforward approach moves readers directly to the central concerns of your essay. Once you feel comfortable with this strategy, you can experiment with the other approaches discussed in the rest of this section.

In 1994 the Republicans won a majority in both the House and the Senate for the first time in forty years. After their victory, there was quite a bit of finger pointing and discussion in the Democratic Party. Some thought the defeat of President Clinton's health care bill was to blame. Others said so many Democrats lost because the party was out of touch with the voters. Certainly both these issues were important, but even more important were taxes, welfare, and anxiety about the national debt:

Serge Komanawski (student)

### 2. Begin with a Narrative

You can begin an essay with a narrative drawn from your personal experience or from a current news event. If your story is interesting, it can involve readers almost immediately. Notice how the narrative in the following introduction sets the stage for an argument in favor of animal testing. Also note that this introductory paragraph does not include a thesis statement. Because the writer considers his thesis to be extremely controversial, he does not state it until his conclusion.

In a desperate—and successful—attempt to save the life of a dying man, woman, child or infant sometime in the next few months, surgeons will implant another heart or liver from a baboon or perhaps even a pig into a human body. Then, two things will happen. Doctors will decide whether the recipient will use the animal organ as a “bridge,” until a human organ can be located for transplant, or if the patient will keep the animal organ as a permanent transplant. Second, animal-rights activists will picket the hospital where the medical miracle took place.

Richard Pothier, “Animal Tests Saved My Life”

**3. Begin with a Question**

Using a question at the beginning of your essay is an effective introductory strategy. Because readers know you will answer the question in your essay—perhaps even in your thesis statement—they will want to read further. Notice how two questions in the following introduction catch the reader’s eye.

Imagine this scene: A child is sitting under a Christmas tree opening her presents. She laughs and claps her hands as she gets a doll, a pair of shoes, and a sweater. What could spoil this picture? What information could cause the child’s parents to feel guilt? The answer is this: that children from developing countries most likely worked long hours in substandard conditions so this American child could receive her gifts.

Megan Davia (student)

**4. Begin by Establishing Common Ground**

Beginning with a general, easily accepted statement can establish a connection between you and your readers by showing them that your ideas are similar to theirs. And, as the following introduction illustrates, establishing common ground can also smoothly pave the way for an unusual, even off-beat, thesis statement.

Let’s face it. Even the most beloved dog can be very stinky at times. And where pet hygiene is concerned, the enlightened pet guardian (and, of course, by that I mean me) has no choice but to share the indoor facilities with the animal.

Merrill Markoe, “Showering with Your Dog”

**5. Begin with a Definition**

A definition at the beginning of your essay can give valuable information to readers. Such information can explain a confusing concept or clarify a complicated idea. As the following paragraph about the kaffiyeh demonstrates, a definition can also arouse interest by introducing an unfamiliar concept.

It is the ultimate cultural survivor in the Middle East: the plain or stitched cotton cloth that Arabs wear on their heads and draped down the back or shoulders. Designed more than 1,000 years ago, it originally protected against the harsh desert climate. Today, it's also an emblem of masculinity, maturity and nationalism. A substitute flag, a mask, a shield. A political or a fashion statement.

Leora Frankel, "History on the Head"

### FOCUS ON INTRODUCTIONS ◀

Don't introduce a definition with a tired opening phrase such as *According to Webster's* or *The American Heritage Dictionary defines*. . . .

#### 6. Begin with a Background Statement

A background statement can provide an overview of a subject and set the stage for the discussion to follow. It can also—as the following introduction illustrates—help prepare readers for a surprising or controversial thesis statement.

English is the most widely spoken language in the history of our planet, used in some way by at least one out of every seven human beings around the globe. Half of the world's books are written in English, and the majority of international telephone calls are made in English. English is the language of over sixty percent of the world's radio programs, many of them beamed, ironically, by the Russians, who know that to win friends and influence nations, they're best off using English. More than seventy percent of international mail is written and addressed in English, and eighty percent of all computer text is stored in English. English has acquired the largest vocabulary of all the world's languages, perhaps as many as two million words, and has generated one of the noblest bodies of literature in the annals of the human race.

Nonetheless, it is now time to face the fact that English is a crazy language.

Richard Lederer, "English Is a Crazy Language"