



intros and conclusions

Introductions and conclusions are difficult because they require the writer to step out of arguing and explaining and talk to their audience instead. Understanding what your reader may know and think before and after reading your ideas will help you package your ideas up for them. When in doubt, imagine you are your reader!

Think of your intro and conclusion paragraphs as the first track in an album. They're an introduction, a call to attention. Do you think the artist writes those first? Probably not—they figure out what the album's bones are going to sound like, then they figure out an intro track that tells the listener what they're in for.

BEFORE WRITING YOUR INTRO PARAGRAPH

- 1) Start with something messy. When rough drafting, take some time to write a “dummy version”, or a casual summary of where you think the paper is going and what the main idea is that brings it all together. Don't worry about it being perfect, and if your body paragraphs veer away from this introduction, that's ok!
- 2) Reflect back. After you finish your first rough draft, read the body paragraphs out loud. Then read your introduction. Did you cover all the topics you thought you'd cover in the body paragraphs? Does your intro need to adjust to the changes in your ideas? Make notes of where/how this may need to happen, but don't do it quite yet.
- 3) Now, write the thing! Once you have your second draft and are more firmly rooted in your ideas and argument, revisit the introduction. Use your dummy introduction if you like, but feel free to start from scratch if you want to.

WRITING THE THING (INTRODUCTION)

1. Hook: You've heard of this before. It's an interesting first sentence that gets the reader interested in your topic. Questions to ask yourself when writing a hook:
If I needed to smoothly bring up this paper in an unrelated conversation, how would I do that?
What's the most interesting fact I've learned in researching? (If you can't think of one, try reading about your topic and looking for one.)
What's a common misconception about your topic?

If you're writing about a text, what have you learned about the author, and how does that relate to your main idea?

2. [General background information](#): This is where you outline the context to your paper. Questions to get you started:

Think about the course you're writing this for. What is it focused on and what would your reader know about that field? What would they need you to tell them in order to understand your argument?

What is the most important historical event or trend in the context of your paper? What assumptions might the reader have about this topic, and are they correct? How environmental conditions and historical circumstances led to this topic or text?

3. [Thesis/argument/main idea and support points](#): What you're contributing to the conversation on the topic. Mention each of your supporting ideas and how they all point to the same main idea. Tips to get you started:

Draw a large umbrella on paper. Inside it, write the topic of this paper in the most general, broad terms. Draw an umbrella under that and label it "thesis". Underneath it, write your evidence/supporting ideas in bullet points. Now, think about what your bullet points all have in common. What idea do they all support and how? What is the smaller 'umbrella' idea that captures them all? Remember, this idea has to be more specific than the big umbrella topic.

Go through each of your body paragraphs/sections. Next to each section, write down how this convinces the reader of your larger argument. When you've done that for all your body paragraphs, take those annotations and see if the phrasing helps you state your thesis and main points more clearly.

AVOID

- Starting with "Throughout history" or "Since the dawn of time". Starting specific is much more interesting than starting broadly.
- Putting evidence in your introduction. There's a place for all your quotes and statistics: the body of your essay.
- The phrase "This paper will". The reader assumes the paper is going somewhere, and what comes after that phrase is self-explanatory!

BEFORE WRITING YOUR CONCLUSION

- 1) [Give yourself a break after writing the body paragraphs](#). No writer has ever written a good conclusion on the first try, or at the same time as writing the rest of the rough draft! For at least 15 minutes, take your brain away from your ideas.
- 2) [Read back over your draft](#). What ideas are repeated? What should the reader be convinced about after reading them? What are you convinced of, and what do you feel and think about the topic?

WRITING THE THING (CONCLUSION)

1. A zoom out, or a transition back to the broader topic. Use these questions to get you started:
What is your favorite point/the strongest point in the paper? How is the reader going to think differently about the topic after reading this point?
What misconceptions about the topic/text may the reader have had before reading your paper? How did you complicate or expand their opinions?
What do you think the reader may feel or think after finishing your paper? Why?
2. Remind the reader why your argument is important. This could be a call to action, an idea for positive change, or an example of how understanding your topic better can lead the reader to better choices.
What audience would benefit from reading this paper? Why?
What bigger social/political/economical argument is this paper a part of?
If you could show this paper to any powerful, who would it be? Why, and what could happen if you did?
What future research could build upon your ideas in this paper?
3. Give yourself a break and come back (repeat as many times as necessary).

AVOID

- Beginning your conclusion by saying “In summary, to conclude, etc.”
- Getting too mushy or sentimental—if you find yourself only coming up with ideas that get too sentimental for the paper, ask yourself why this topic is important and resonant. What reasons and examples from the paper should show them this matters?