

LUC WRITING CENTER – “WRITING INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS”

The **introduction** and **conclusion** are important parts of any academic essay, but they can also be two of the most difficult paragraphs to write, partly because there are no universal rules dictating what they should consist of. The following tips – intended primarily for textual analyses, research papers, and other argumentative essays – may be helpful, but keep in mind that these are suggestions rather than rules. If in doubt, the best course of action is always to **ask your professor** about his or her expectations.

The Introduction:

The purpose of the introduction is simple: it should introduce the essay’s argument. The introduction to an academic paper will generally include a **thesis statement**, a sentence-long expression of the essay’s argument that is usually placed at the end of the paragraph. Some professors will use the term **argumentative claim** (or just **claim**) instead of thesis.

If the thesis statement comes at the end of the introduction, then what should come before it? One way to structure your introduction so that it builds effectively towards the thesis is to focus the first part of the introduction on describing your **topic**. The topic is simply your subject-matter; it is the issue about which you’re making a claim. Imagine that you’re writing a paper about climate change that argues for the use of renewable sources of energy. Before jumping immediately into your argument, it can be helpful to orient your reader in relation to this topic – to start out with broader contexts before narrowing your focus down to the thesis. The introduction is like a roadmap: it tells the reader where your paper will take them, and it gives them the information they need to begin that journey. An effective introduction might be structured to briefly address the following questions: 1) What is climate change? 2) Why is it a controversial issue? 3) What is your claim about it?

This introduction would consist of two major parts: the **topic (roughly 4-6 sentences)** and the **thesis statement/claim (1-2 sentences)**.

This is not the only way to write an introduction, and this model should be viewed as flexible and open to **creativity**, but it can be helpful if you’re stuck and don’t know how to get started. Students struggling with writer’s block will often opt for easy solutions that aren’t always the most effective methods for introducing a formal argument. Avoid beginning your essay with a **quotation**. This is your argument, and it is important to start and finish it with your own voice. Avoid **personal stories**. Personal experiences can absolutely have a place in an academic essay, but they should be treated as supporting evidence for your argument, not given primary importance. Finally, every essay should contain a degree of creativity, but be careful to balance creativity with formality. There can be advantages to drawing your reader in with a compelling **hook**, but not if it is at the expense of focus and relevance.

The Conclusion:

Ending an essay can be as difficult as starting one, and there are perhaps even fewer formal guidelines for conclusions than there are for introductions. There are many ways of writing a good conclusion, but there are a couple features that most effective conclusions will include. The conclusion should include a **restatement of the thesis**, and it should emphasize the **significance**

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of your argument. One way of underscoring the importance of your argument is to relate your findings to a broader context. If you’ve written an analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, you might relate your argument about the novel to its cultural legacy, to the critical conversation surrounding it, or to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s body of work. If you do this, you’ve succeeded in restating your claim in light of the evidence you’ve discussed in your body paragraphs, linking the conclusion back to the introduction, and pointing out some broader implications of what you’ve demonstrated.

It is common for a student’s restated thesis to be a clearer and more precise expression of their argument than their thesis in the introduction. This is natural in an early draft, as most writers will have a fuller understanding of their argument after they’ve written it than they will when they’re just getting started. When a paper is submitted in this condition, however, it reflects a superficial and neglectful **revision** process. After you write your conclusion, go back and compare it to your introduction. Do you end someplace different from where you started? Is your conclusion consistent with the claims you made in the thesis? If you want to write the strongest essay possible, the writing process will not end the moment you finish your first draft.

As is the case with the introduction, there are some pitfalls to conclusion writing that you’ll want to avoid. Just as you shouldn’t start with a quote, you should be careful not to end with one either. Conclude the paper on your terms, with your voice. You should also not introduce any new major points in your conclusion – these should be introduced and thoroughly discussed in your body paragraphs.

There are no concrete rules for how long an introduction or conclusion should be. Remember, though, that quality is more important than quantity, as long as you meet your professor’s length requirements. Does your conclusion effectively summarize your argument and demonstrate its importance? If so, then you should feel confident about it.

Resources:

As stated above, it is always advisable to ask your professor about his or her preferences and expectations. Writing Center tutors can also provide one-on-one guidance and instruction. Other helpful resources are listed below:

- [“Argumentative Essays,” “Introductions”](#) (Purdue OWL)
- [“Introductions,” “Conclusions”](#) (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
- [“Intros”](#) (University of Richmond)