

Intro to Writing, Part 7: Introductions and Conclusions

High School Tutorial

The Introduction: Hooking Your Reader

When you've written a stellar essay about a topic you feel strongly about, how do you get the reader interested in it?

Create an interest or curiosity in your topic by hooking your reader in the introduction. In fact, your first sentence or paragraph is called a **hook**.

Use an intriguing fact, quotation, or question to hook your reader. Think about choosing the right words or painting a vivid picture. As a high school writer, you are too old to begin an essay like this:

Horses are my favorite animal.

Instead, you will use well-placed words to indicate to the reader that your favorite animal is the horse:

Nothing can match the steady rhythm of my horse as he gallops across the meadow. He carries me with him, and I feel the power of his sturdy body as we fly. For a few moments, I am riding a living, breathing magic carpet.

Underline the words in that example that tell the reader that the horse is this student's favorite animal. Notice that the writer tries to pull the reader into the experience instead of simply reporting an opinion. Keep in mind this more mature way of writing when you hit the keyboard.

Avoid telling the reader in the introduction what you eventually are going to tell him in your essay. Giving an audience a heads up may be a good tactic for speeches or sermons, but it bores and insults readers. This introductory paragraph is suitable for elementary school writing:

I am going to write my opinion on why I like my youth choir. I like it because I love to sing, I enjoy the challenge of learning new and difficult songs, and I have the opportunity to travel to many cities and sing with other choirs.

That paragraph is a yawner. It does not create any interest or curiosity in the reader because it's only a dry list of what will follow in the paper. Younger students may have learned how to write this way; it aided them in organizing their thoughts. But you are too old for that now.

Professional Tip

You have **one paragraph** in which to capture your reader's attention. That is **less than one minute** of reading time.

As an older student, you need more mature techniques. This introduction to an opinion is appropriate for high school writing:

We file onto the dark stage and take our positions on the risers, trying to ignore the buzz from the audience on the other side of the curtain as we quietly hum our first measures over and over. The girl next to me hums her lines, too, and she throws me off. I clear my throat, unlock my knees, and wish I could look at my music just one more time. Beyond the curtain, I hear the director's shoes squeak across the stage as the audience quiets itself. Now the curtain is lifting. The audience is clapping. Above the noise, I try to hear the note from the pitch pipe. The baton moves. I take a deep breath. I wouldn't miss this concert for the world.



This scenario successfully uses descriptions to show the writer's love of the choir, and it creates some excitement and anticipation.

Include these elements in your introduction:

1. An interesting beginning to **hook** your readers.
2. The **subject matter**, like how to consistently make three-pointers in basketball or the ethics of using elephants in circuses.
3. Your **opinion** of the topic, if this is an opinion paper.
4. Your **thesis statement** to show what direction you are taking your subject.



If the reader doesn't know the subject matter, your opinion of it, or what direction you are taking it in by the end of the first paragraph, adjust your introduction. In some instances, you may need to include some background information as well.

Below is an introductory paragraph about recycling. It begins with a quotation that creates some curiosity for the topic. Based on the list above, what grade would you give this introduction?



"Only two human-made structures on Earth are large enough to be seen from outer space: the Great Wall of China and the Fresh Kills landfill, located on the western shore of Staten Island," according to justlivegreener.com. We are slowly destroying our planet. If we keep throwing stuff into landfills, we will eventually run out of space. The answer to this problem is simple. Reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Now it's your turn: Write an introductory paragraph on the topic of teens owning credit cards. You can choose a side (*for* the idea or *against* it) or imagine you are writing an essay to explore both sides. If you choose a side, let your readers know before the end of your introduction which side you are on.

You will not be writing this essay.

Conclusions: Finishing Strong

Good introductions and conclusions don't just lie there like a headboard and footboard. They *do* something. They have a purpose. Use them to your advantage.

The **concluding paragraph** (the **conclusion**) is your last chance to have any effect at all on the reader. Devise a paragraph for the highest impact your topic requires. Use another question or quotation, or begin a story in the introduction and finish it in the conclusion.

In addition, your conclusion will be stronger if you are mindful of the items in this list (elaborations follow the list):

1. Avoid recounting each point your essay just made.
2. Avoid introducing a new thought or point here.
3. Include a rewritten version of your thesis statement.
4. If you can tie your conclusion to your introduction, do so.
5. Leave your reader with some food for thought and/or draw some insightful conclusions.

1) Avoid recounting each point your essay just made. Sermons and speeches use the conclusion to review, but this is tedious for readers of short reports or articles. If readers want to review written information, they can simply reread a section. Recapping or summing up is insulting to the reader and can leave the reading experience as flat as warm, day-old soda.

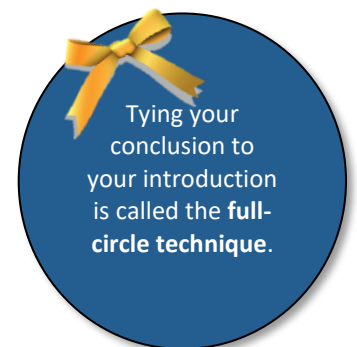
If your report or term paper is very long (a few thousand words or longer), you may consider recounting your points. But state them in a different manner than you stated them earlier. Nonfiction books use this reviewing technique effectively. But they are books, not short essays.

2) Avoid introducing a new thought or point here. Introducing a new point in the conclusion is a common mistake. Beginning writers think they are leaving the reader with something interesting to think about by inserting a new point in the conclusion. However, this only confuses the reader and leaves him wondering why, if it were so important, the writer hid it in the conclusion with little chance of supporting it. Instead, try using a strong story or fact to illustrate your main point. Or leave the reader with a cud-chewing question or statement.

3) Include a rewritten version of your thesis statement. Stating your opinion in a new way can solidify it in your reader's mind. Avoid copying it from the first paragraph; find an engaging way to restate it. [Find a tutorial on thesis statements here. >>](https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-6-easily-develop-thesis-statements/)
(<https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-6-easily-develop-thesis-statements/>)

4) If you can tie your conclusion to your introduction, do so. Tying the conclusion to the introduction can give the reader a satisfying experience. It is called the **full-circle technique**, and it has the feeling of neatly putting a bow around the subject. Here are some handy ways to tie your conclusion to your introduction:

- Answer the question you began with. Example: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1 KJV). The answer? The last two words in the chapter: "the transgressors."
- Create a contrast. Example: Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd...") begins with the shepherd living a homeless life in fields. It ends with a permanent residence—"the house of the Lord, forever."
- Use synonyms or repetition. Examples: If you use *toxic* in your introduction to describe the effect of divorce on children, try using the word *poison* in the conclusion. When referring to drug usage and its dangers, mention a dangerous boa constrictor and its deadly coils in the introduction and repeat the word *coils* in the conclusion.
- Finish a story or refer to it. Example: The story of a car accident that begins in the introduction can be finished in the conclusion to show the negative effects of texting while driving.



5) Leave your reader with some food for thought. Your conclusion is your last chance to sway your reader or make an impact. Leave your reader with something intriguing to think about. Draw stellar conclusions. Make brilliant observations. If this is a persuasive essay, include a **call to action**, something measurable that the readers can do such as call the mayor or have their pet neutered.

On the next page is the conclusion of a student's paper on recycling. Read it and write a grade in the margin based on how effective you think her conclusion is.



We all need to step up and take responsibility for the world we live in. It does not take much to make a change. Throw that soda can into the recycling bin instead of the trashcan, bless someone else with that toy you have outgrown, or buy a reusable water bottle instead of disposable one. Will you seize the opportunity to make a difference? St. Clement of Alexandria once wrote, “We are not to throw away those things which can benefit our neighbor. Goods are called good because they can be used for good; they are instruments for good, in the hands of those who use them properly.”

Here and on the next page are three sets of introductions and conclusions. They are all written by students and are on the topic of heroes. Read each set and then answer the questions that follow.

Set 1
Intro and
conclusion

When I was a little kid, I loved Superman. He was my favorite super hero. I had Superman pajamas and red cowboy boots that I wore around the house. Saving the world was easy with my super powers. The only thing that stood in my way was bedtime. But when I got older, I had to accept the fact that there is no such thing as a person with super powers. Heroes, though, still exist, and they have many qualities in common that make them heroes.

Even though I can't be Superman like I wanted to be when I was little, I can still be a hero. All it takes is a little courage.

Set 2
Intro and
conclusion

What makes a hero? Is it the clothes? Is it the adoring fans? Actually, it is none of the above. Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. It does not matter how old they are. It is the character qualities that they possess that make them heroes.

None of these people became heroes because of lucky circumstances. Their heroism came straight from the character qualities within themselves. That is what makes a true hero. If you do not think you have the makings of a hero, think again. There are qualities within you that are exactly what makes a hero. All you have to do is let them shine.

Set 3
Intro and
conclusion

He's the lonely kid in school: too short to play on the basketball team, too freckled to attract the girls, and too shy to make friends. He rarely raises his hand in class, and when he does, the teacher doesn't seem to care. Though his eyes never leave the floor, this kid longs more than anything to have others raise their eyes to him in respect. What this student and many others may fail to recognize is that the qualities of a hero are never based fully on circumstances. Rather, heroism is achieved through strength, courage, and selflessness many ordinary people are willing to develop.

He may not have the good looks or high grades to make him popular, but that lonely kid in school does possess the ability to become a hero. Whether he goes out of his way to encourage a struggling classmate, supports a fundraiser at school for the local rescue mission, or merely exhibits a selfless attitude, that kid can, in his own way, become a hero.

Answer these questions:

1. Which introduction do you like the best? Explain.
2. Which one seems to introduce the topic of heroes best? Explain.
3. Which conclusion do you like the best? Explain.
4. Which conclusion seems to wrap up the topic best? Explain.
5. Give each set a grade. Yes, explain.

Set 1



Set 2



Set 3



Now it's your turn: On a separate piece of paper, write a concluding paragraph for your opinion on teens owning credit cards. Avoid the pitfalls in the list on page 3 and include items # 3-5 (thesis statement, tie conclusion to intro, and thought-provoking conclusions).

Make it sparkle; leave your reader with some perceptive food for thought.

Just one more thing, and then you're through with this tutorial . . .

First Sentence Anxiety Disorder

If you have been following along with the [Intro to Writing tutorials](#) from Writing with Sharon Watson, you'll notice what you did *not* do in them. You did not begin by wrestling with the introduction, pounding your way through paragraphs of points, and sweating out a conclusion.

You began writing in the middle—in the body of your paper. That's a helpful technique to use, especially when it's difficult to find a way to start writing. Beginning in the middle avoids **First Sentence Anxiety Disorder** (a completely fictitious name—but the anxiety is real). FSAD can strike beginning and professional writers alike.

Concentrating first on the body of your paper will save you from staring at a blank piece of paper or an empty computer screen for hours, trying to come up with a witty first sentence. *After* you write the body, you can backtrack and write the clever beginning and the powerful ending.

Some professional writers know what they want in their conclusion before they write the rest of the article, so they write their conclusion first and fill in everything else later. Some writers have a great hook or thesis statement in mind as soon as they sit down to write, so they begin at the very beginning.

“What about the thesis statement?” you ask. “Shouldn't I develop that first?” The truth is that writers often mentally flow back and forth between determining their thesis statement (main idea) and their points or reasons. Frequently what they learn about their topic helps inform or determine their thesis statement. So don't sweat it. Start writing wherever you can and adjust everything later. [Find the tutorial on thesis statements here.](#) >>

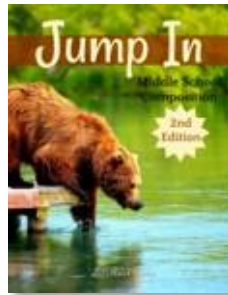
No doubt, when you examine your subject matter and work habits, you will figure out where you want to begin writing, especially if you have an informal list or bunch of sticky notes you've arranged into a formidable order. [To review how to organize your ideas and points, go to this tutorial.](#) >>

Teachers

[Find the middle school version of this tutorial here. >>](https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-7-introductions-and-conclusions/) (https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-7-introductions-and-conclusions/)

[Find the Intro to Writing tutorials, Parts 1-6, here. >>](https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-6-easily-develop-thesis-statements/) (https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/intro-to-writing-part-6-easily-develop-thesis-statements/)

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