

WRITING INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introductions:

The introduction of a paper can be the key to success or failure of the paper as a whole. Remember that it is the reader's first impression which is most lasting, and it is the job of the introduction both to 1) interest the reader and 2) establish the pattern of thinking which you want him to follow as he reads your paper. Here are several good ways to begin papers.

1. Topical event or current controversy:

If you already know everything you need to know about voice mail, please press 1 and turn the page. If you need more information, hang on, and the rest of this story will be with you shortly.

2. New look at a familiar situation:

Few ideas are more entrenched in the American popular consciousness than the value of a college education. It's the key to success. By and large, economists agree: college graduates earn much more than high school graduates, and the gap widened in the 1980's. The conclusions seem obvious. Stay in school. In a high-tech world-with specialized skills in acute shortage-we'd all be better off if more Americans went to college. Not necessarily.

3. Interesting quotation: Try Bracelet's Familiar Quotations or find your own, but be sure to give credit to whoever said it.

4. Definition: Use one that involves controversy and confusion and is central to your essay.

5. Striking fact or statistic: Be sure to name your source.

According to Robert Samuelson (Newsweek, Aug. 31, 1992), grade inflation in high schools is the norm. In 1966, 15% of entering college freshman had A averages in high school. By 1991, the share with A averages had climbed to 24%, despite a decline in college board scores over the same period.

6. Dilemma or puzzle: Begin with one to be solved, or at least understood. The aim is to make the reader want to read on and find out the answer.

7. Controversial question: Put the question concisely and interestingly and be sure to offer an answer.

Example: "Should a man put loyalty to his country above loyalty to a friend? Does loyalty to the government come before loyalty to one's family? How we answer such questions depends on..."

8. Analogy: One between two things that seem quite different but really have something important in common.

Example: "President Clinton's policy of immediately lifting the ban on gays in the military is equivalent to a commander ordering his troops, "Ready, fire, aim!"

9. Set the scene: One that involves the reader in the issue or event to be described. Using specifics with strong sensory appeal is important to this effect.

10. Amusing incident or anecdote: One that engages the reader's interest and leads into your subject.

Example: "As a veteran writer of medical articles for large circulation magazines, I have a similar feeling to the violinist who rebelled after being with an orchestra for thirty years. One day, he sat with his hands folded during rehearsal, and when the conductor demanded furiously, 'Why aren't you playing?' replied, 'Because I don't like music.' Sometimes I feel like sitting at my typewriter with my hands folded. I don't like mass-media writing."

CONCLUSIONS

An ending should wrap things up without beating the reader over the head. In other words, it should provide a sense of completion; of promises kept; of ideas and experiences summed up without the reader feeling, "You said that already!"

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when trying to finish your essay.

1. Keep the conclusion proportional in length to the essay as a whole.
2. Try to summarize, but with a new twist. New twists can be added by discussing the implications of what has been said.
3. Look to your beginning for a key word or phrase that you can work into the end.
4. Make use of the same rhetorical devices that can begin or develop an essay effectively. Quotations, anecdotes, metaphors, questions can all be used to sum up as well as begin an essay.