

## INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introductions and conclusions are among the most challenging of all paragraphs. Why? Because introductions and conclusions must do more than simply state a topic sentence and offer support. Introductions and conclusions must synthesize and provide context for your entire argument, and they must also make the proper impression on your reader.

### *Introductions*

Your introduction is your chance to get your reader interested in your subject. Accordingly, the tone of the paragraph has to be just right. You want to inform, but not to the point of being dull; you want to intrigue, but not to the point of being vague; you want to take a strong stance, but not to the point of alienating your reader. Pay attention to the nuances of your tone. Seek out a second reader if you're not sure that you've managed to get the tone the way you want it.

Equally important to the tone of the introduction is that your introduction needs to "place" your argument into some larger context. Some strategies follow:

1. *Announce your topic broadly, then declare your particular take.* For example, if you are interested in talking about the narrator in Virginia Woolf's novels, you might 1) begin by saying that Woolf's narrator has posed a problem for many of her critics; 2) provide a quick definition of the problem, as others have defined it; and 3) declare your thesis (which states your own position on the matter).

thesis statement will affect the paper that follows. Simply adding the new introductory paragraph will not produce a "completed" paper.)

### *Conclusions*

Conclusions are also difficult to write. How do you manage to make the reader feel persuaded by what you've said? Even if the points of your paper are strong, the overall effect of your argument might fall to pieces if the paper as a whole is badly concluded.

Many students end their papers by simply summarizing what has come before. A summary of what the reader has just read is important to the conclusion - particularly if your argument has been complicated or has covered a lot of ground. But a good conclusion will do more. Just as the introduction sought to place the paper in the larger, ongoing conversation about the topic, so should the conclusion insist on returning the reader to that ongoing conversation, but with the feeling that they have learned something more. You don't want your reader to finish your paper and say, "So what?" Admittedly, writing a conclusion isn't easy to do.

Many of the strategies we've listed for improving your introductions can help you to improve your conclusions as well. In your conclusion you might:

1. Return to the **ongoing conversation**, emphasizing the importance of your own contribution to it.
2. Consider again the **background information** with which you began, and illustrate how your argument has shed new light on that information.
3. Return to the **key terms** and point out how your essay has added some new dimension to their meanings.
4. Use an **anecdote or quotation** that summarizes or reflects your main idea.
5. Acknowledge your **opponents** - if only to emphasize that you've beaten them.
6. Remember: **language** is especially important to a conclusion. Your goal in your final sentences is to leave your ideas resounding in your reader's mind. Give her something to think about. Make your language ring.