



Introductions and Conclusions

In a five-paragraph essay, the introduction and conclusion are very important. After all, they represent 40 percent of your essay!

Introductions

The *introduction* of a paper serves two purposes: (1) It clarifies what the essay is about, and (2) it grabs the reader's interest. The first goal is straightforward. The second one is more challenging.

Think about a few of your favorite movies. Now think about how they begin. You'll probably discover that most movies begin with a dramatic or suspenseful opening. This is called a *hook*. Whether it's a bit of slapstick humor or a violent encounter, the hook is intended to get you involved with the story right away and keep you watching. This same principle applies to essay writing.

Now, this does not mean that you have to have a sensational opening, but it should interest the reader by *showing—not telling*. Let's look at two versions of introductions to open our "Health Food for Kids" paper. Which one does a better job of introducing the essay? Which one would make you want to continue reading?

Kids eat a lot of food that is really bad for them. They eat so much junk food that they get used to it and think it's the way they're supposed to eat. They eat candy and chew gum, too. In this essay I am going to write about different healthful foods that are also tasty. After all, "you are what you eat."

The sugar-coated purple cereal is disappearing as you slurp it down with chocolate milk. You jam some bubble gum in your mouth and hop on your bike. After hanging out at your friend's house, you get hungry and head for the nearest fast-food joint for your hamburger, fries, and Coke. Does this sound familiar? There are too many kids who eat very unhealthy foods and do not know there are tasty foods that are not bad for them. So, do yourself a favor and read ahead for a healthful menu for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The first paragraph does a good job of clarifying the topic and explaining how the essay will progress. It's a fine introduction. The second version, however, is much more interesting, isn't it? It begins with a story line and grabs the reader's interest. The words are lively, and we are *shown* someone eating instead of being told about it.



Introductions and Conclusions *(cont.)*

Introductions *(cont.)*

The second introduction also gives you an idea of how the paper will proceed. Of course, you don't have to write something quite so dramatic. Here's another possibility:

What do you think of when you hear the words "health food?" Most kids think of food that tastes bad. After eating a health food candy bar, one of my friends said it tasted like cardboard. However, not all health food tastes bad. Here is a healthful menu for kids to choose from.

This is another very good version. It is not a story line, but it uses good comparisons and begins with a question that gets the reader involved.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of your *conclusion* is to bring your paper to an end, to "wrap it up." Like introductions, good conclusions are interesting, leaving the reader with a strong sense of the paper. You should mention the points you just covered, but you don't need to "spell them out." This can be done a number of ways. Let's compare two conclusions for our health foods essay.

In conclusion, eating healthful foods makes a lot of sense. Those kids who continue to eat junk food all the time will only end up with bad eating habits when they get older. The foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner that I have listed are great alternatives to unhealthy foods. You should always remember that "you are what you eat!"

*So, the next time you pop that jaw breaker into your mouth, the next time you eat oily potato chips for dinner, remember that there are tasty choices that **won't hurt your body**. Melons taste a lot like candy if you haven't been eating white sugar from those little packets every time you go to a restaurant. It might take a little getting used to, but once you begin to eat a healthful breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you'll feel and look better.*

The first conclusion is okay. It uses the helpful phrase "In conclusion" and reminds the reader what he or she just read. But notice how the second example is livelier. It also brings the essay to a close while keeping the reader involved. It also has the same kind of story line as the second introduction. This is called an *envelope strategy*, which is common in essay and story writing. You open and close your essay in the same way. This helps give your essay a sense of order.

Final Tip: As long as you have a good outline, it's often best to leave the writing of the introduction and conclusion until *after* you have written the body (three main idea paragraphs) of the paper. Once you see the details down on paper, it's easier to write engaging openings and closings.



Introductions and Conclusions *(cont.)*

Introductions and Conclusions Exercises

1. Below you will find an introduction and a conclusion for an essay on computers. Rewrite them, bringing them to life by showing instead of telling. Consider using the envelope strategy. Share your versions with your classmates.

Introduction

Computers are changing the way we live. Computers have become very important in day-to-day life. This is especially true in the workplace, where computers are a necessity. In this essay, I will show you some of the major ways computers have changed the way we live.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown how computers have caused great changes to come about in society. Both our home life and our work life have been changed by e-mail, the Internet, and so forth. In the future, there will probably be even more changes.

2. For each of the following topics, write an attractive introduction and conclusion.

A. Racism

B. Chocolate

C. Vacations
