Introductions and Conclusions

A good introduction and conclusion is crucial to effective academic writing: Introductions might be your best opportunity to really engage your audience about a new topic. Conclusions are often the parts of the paper which stick the longest in the mind of the reader.

Things to avoid when writing an introduction:

- Do not call attention to the fact that you are writing a composition. “I am writing to convince you that…” does not convince more than simply starting and stating.
- Do not apologize for not being an expert on a topic. After all, you still hope to write an effective, well-argued, well-justified paper.
- Avoid massive and obvious generalizations. “Since the beginning of time, people have been at war” does not help a reader get introduced to the topic of your specific paper.

Ideas for effective introductions:

- In a thesis-driven essay, your introduction should explain the topic, the issue and the controversy of the subject.
- Your own position or thesis should be clear to the reader by the end of the introduction.
- A brief background to the issue may help situate the reader in relation to the topic.
- An introduction can show a reader why your particular topic is important or significant.
- An introduction can attract a reader to your topic by establishing significance, presenting a new piece of information, or using an illustration, quotation or question.
- A brief explanation in the introduction of the paper’s structure can help situate the reader to best follow your arguments and analyses to come.

Things to avoid when writing a conclusion:

- Don’t restate everything you’ve already said. In a long, complicated paper, a terse summation of your main points right before your concluding sentences may help your reader grasp your ideas. A short paper usually requires little more than a few sentences.
- Don’t leave readers suspended in midair, half expecting you to go on.
- Don’t just re-use your introduction by re-arranging the same phrases.
- Don’t introduce a brand-new topic that strays from the point of your essay.

Ideas for effective conclusions:

- Be sure the reader leaves your paper with a clear answer to why this topic is significant.
- A conclusion can be a place to ask the question “what is the next topic for analysis in this discussion, now that my topic has been discussed?” (You do not have to answer this question in the conclusion.)
- Bookending – referring back to an element of the introduction as part of the conclusion – can be satisfying for the reader, and extremely effective.
- Using a final anecdote can personalize your paper, and make it more memorable.