

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions and conclusions are relatively short sections of an essay, but they play an important role in helping readers understand and evaluate your argument.



The Introduction

A typical introduction is around 10-15% of the total word count. A useful structure contains four elements.

1. Background

Provide enough context for the reader to understand the topic. Keep background information relevant to the essay title.

2. Focus

Narrow the discussion to the specific problem, issue, or question being addressed.

3. Roadmap

Briefly indicate how the essay will answer the question. This helps readers understand the direction of the discussion.

4. Thesis Statement

Present the main argument clearly and directly. The thesis statement is your answer to the essay question.

What to Avoid in Introductions

Avoid:

- Dictionary definitions
- Broad generalisations
- Excessive detail
- Information unrelated to the essay title

The Conclusion

Like the introduction, the conclusion usually represents around 10-15% of the total word count. A useful conclusion contains three elements.

1. Restate the Main Findings

Draw together the key points that emerged from the discussion.

2. Restate the Thesis

Return to the central argument using different wording.

3. Explain the Significance

Address the "So what?" question. Explain why the argument matters and what readers should take away from the discussion

What to Avoid in Conclusions

Avoid:

- Introducing new evidence
- Raising completely new ideas
- Ending with an unanswered question
- Relying on quotations to provide the final point

The conclusion should end with your own argument and interpretation

Writing a Strong Thesis Statement

A thesis statement should be:

Debatable

The reader should be able to disagree with it by engaging with your arguments and evidence.

Weak:

Pollution is bad for the environment.

Stronger:

Pollution has long-term environmental effects that are difficult to reverse.

Focused

Avoid claims that are so broad they could cover an entire subject area. Narrow the argument to a specific issue, cause, effect, or debate.

Reviewing Your Introduction and Conclusion

Take a previous essay and check:

- Have I provided enough context?
- Is the focus clear?
- Have I included a roadmap?
- Is the thesis specific and arguable?
- Does the conclusion explain why the discussion matters?

Find out more tips and resources at tcd.ie/sld