

Introductions & Conclusions

Writing Centre Learning Guide

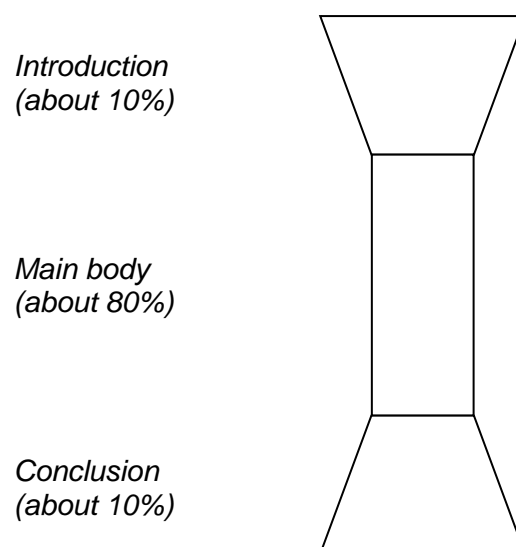
Good essays, reports or theses start with good introductions and end with good conclusions. The introduction leads your reader into the main text, while the conclusion leaves your reader with a final impression. Although introductions and conclusions have some similarities, they also have many differences.

Why do we write introductions and conclusions?

Imagine that you are trying to read an essay without an introduction. It might start something like this: 'This debate over the right of access to chocolate has continued for many centuries.' At this point, you might question which debate the writer is referring to. That is because you have no context and no background to the statement. In other words, you have not been introduced to the writer's ideas. Then imagine that the essay ends: 'Chocolate finally became accessible to most parts of the world in the second half of the twentieth century.' Here, you might feel that the writer has finished rather abruptly. They have given specific information, but have left you with the feeling that the arguments/ideas have not been tied up effectively. Without an introduction and a conclusion, there is only the body of the essay to read. A good structure, however, will lead the reader into the body and then lead them out again, so that their final journey through the essay has been a satisfying one that feels complete.

What should an essay's structure look like?

In general, an essay looks a bit like an egg-timer, or a Christmas cracker:



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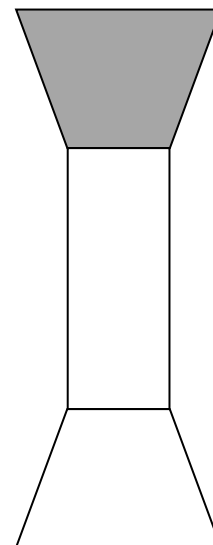
Level 3 East, Hub Central
North Terrace campus, The University of Adelaide

ph +61 8 8313 3021
writingcentre@adelaide.edu.au
www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/

Introductions

An introduction starts with general information and becomes more specific. It may include several of the following:

- **an opening sentence** (which tells the reader what the general topic is)
 - Capture your reader's attention and draw them into the introduction.
- **background information on the topic**
 - Only give enough background to provide a context; you may need to provide more background in the main body of the assignment.
- **the question rephrased in your own words**
 - Show your lecturer that you understand the question by paraphrasing it.
- **an indication of why the topic is important**
- **a gap in previous research**
 - Indicate what still needs to be addressed in a particular area, and where your research fits into the wider body of knowledge.
- **definitions of important words and terms**
 - Only define the most important words, and do so briefly; further definition may need to be given in the main body.
- **references**
 - Give limited references to strengthen the importance of your argument or your need to do further research.
- **an indication of your subtopics**
 - Tell your reader what smaller areas you will address in the main points.
- **a thesis statement** (which gives a plan of action for your assignment)
 - Make clear to your reader what your main points will be and what perspective you will take. Usually the thesis statement comes at the end of the introduction. It can be one or two sentences.



Some people have trouble with introductions because they use the writing of the introduction as a means of planning their essay. You should always **plan** your essay **before** writing the introduction; in fact, you can write the introduction last, after you have written the main body and conclusion. That way, you will know exactly what you are introducing.

Example 1: Introduction

<p>The debate over the right of access to chocolate has developed greatly over recent years. Whereas chocolate was formerly regarded as the domain of the wealthy, it has now come to be more widely seen as a right to which all are entitled. There are some, however, who see the diversity of approaches as being 'socially constructed', meaning that different groups of people are conditioned, or expected, to want or need chocolate, even if this conflicts with their natural inclinations (Brown & White 2007). To date, while some research has focussed on perceptions of chocolate in the general population, little research has been done into how chocolate is perceived by those involved in higher education. This essay will examine past and present attitudes to chocolate, and illustrate how the construct of 'chocolate' varies between two different social groups in Australia, namely university academic staff and students, in order to show that all should have a right to chocolate but not all may wish to avail themselves of this right.</p>	<p>General opening</p> <p>Background information</p> <p>Recent issues; definition; reference</p> <p>Gap in knowledge</p> <p>Thesis statement</p>
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Example by Julia Miller

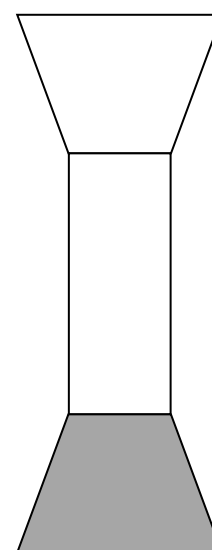
Conclusions

The conclusion does not need to repeat any background from the introduction. Some people make the mistake of cutting and pasting the points from their introduction. This is inappropriate for two reasons: first, it is self-plagiarism; second, we already know what you have told us in the introduction, so there is no need to repeat it. In particular, be careful to avoid telling your reader how you wrote the essay. We do not need to know: 'This essay has considered a, b and c. It has shown p, q and r. It has also been claimed that x, y and z'. If you write this way, you are focussing on your action in writing, rather than on the ideas of the essay. It would be better to say: 'In conclusion, a, b and c are clearly important'; or 'P, q and r are key to . . . However, x, y and z are less central to the argument.'

N.B. Do not add new information to a conclusion. If something is important, put it in the body of the assignment.

A conclusion starts with specific information and becomes more general. It may include several of the following:

- **a summary of the main points**
 - Remind your reader what the main points were, but don't use the same wording as elsewhere in the assignment.
- **your findings**, if applicable
 - Re-emphasise what you discovered after researching for this essay.
- **your response to the question, together with possible solutions**
 - Restate your main argument, if you had an argument.
 - Remind the reader of your suggested solutions to any problems raised in the essay.
- **remaining problems and questions**
 - Indicate what still needs to be solved; don't be afraid to admit that you don't know everything.
- **areas for future research**
 - Give suggestions for future research which could address the same problem.
- **a strong final sentence** (that leaves the reader with an overall impression of your views on the topic)
 - Link your opinion to the broader topic.



Example 1: Conclusion

<p>It can be seen, then, that chocolate is a right, as well as a social construct, but that different social groups within Australian higher education view the concept of 'chocolate' differently. Lecturers tend to prefer dark chocolate, while students indicate a preference for milk chocolate, even though both types of chocolate are available. More research is needed, however, to investigate gender and age differences in regard to these preferences. Worldwide, it is evident from the literature that despite greater transportability and increased production, in many locations chocolate is still only available to the privileged few. What is clear, therefore, is that although all should have a right to chocolate this is not the case in every society, and even those who have this right do not always choose to exercise it. Only when chocolate is finally available to everyone will it be possible to claim that chocolate is no longer restricted to the wealthy, but has become a right for every individual throughout the world.</p>	<p>Summary of argument</p> <p>Findings</p> <p>Area for future research</p> <p>Remaining problems</p> <p>Strong final sentence</p>
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Example by Julia Miller

Exercise

The following sentences are from the introduction and conclusion of the same essay. Separate them into two groups, **introduction** and **conclusion**, and put them in the correct order.

1. Despite these problems, it is possible for teachers to make a positive contribution to learners' knowledge in this important area.
2. The essay which follows gives a brief history of prepositional theory and discusses two major teaching strategies from a cognitive linguistic perspective.
3. The concept of definiteness in relation to articles remains, however, more problematic, and needs further investigation.
4. The evidence presented here suggests that learners do not use articles randomly, but that they choose articles according to whether or not the noun is countable.
5. These small connecting words do not necessarily exist in other languages, or may not have exactly the same meanings.
6. The use of prepositions in English has always been problematic for language learners.
7. In conclusion, it is apparent that the most effective element in teaching of English articles is the reinforcement of the notion of countability.
8. This makes teaching of this area very difficult, and research (Lindstromberg 1998; Brala 2002) indicates that no single method has yet proved successful.

Answers

Introduction

6. The use of prepositions in English has always been problematic for language learners. These small connecting words do not necessarily exist in other languages, or may not have exactly the same meanings.

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2. The essay which follows gives a brief history of prepositional theory and discusses two major teaching strategies from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

Conclusion

7. In conclusion, it is apparent that the most effective element in teaching of English articles is the reinforcement of the notion of countability.

4. The evidence presented here suggests that learners do not use articles randomly, but that they choose articles according to whether or not the noun is countable.

3. The concept of definiteness in relation to articles remains, however, more problematic, and needs further investigation.

1. Despite these problems, it is possible for teachers to make a positive contribution to learners' knowledge in this important area.

Other useful resources

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/essay-writing>

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

Oshima, A & Hogue, A 2006, *Writing academic English*, 4th edn, Pearson Longman, White Plains, NY.