

# Yuba College Writing and Language Development Center

## Writing Introductions & Conclusions

How do you create a “hook” that makes a reader want to read your paper? And how in the world do you end satisfactorily? To create a sense of finality in your conclusion, revisit the material and strategy of the introduction. Choose one from the list below and use it to approach both problems.

- *Illustrate*: Show instead of tell.
- *Challenge*: Raise reader expectations.
- *Quote*: Make use of other people’s words: lyric writers, poets, orators, politicians
- *Compare/contrast*: Evoke familiarity by comparing. Create tension and expectation by contrasting.
- *Define*: Define—or redefine in a unique way.
- *Make a provocative statement*: Offer an amazing statistic or personal insight.

### Illustrate

An illustration can be as simple as a personal *story* or *anecdote*. Stories and anecdotes can be effective introductions to any kind of paper, not just personal narratives. The following anecdote introduces a research paper on vegetarian and vegan diets. The conclusion returns briefly to the story:

Introduction:

*We took our sons fishing one moonlit night. In the quiet of the night, one of them hooked a small trout. But when the landed fish screamed aloud, my son fled the scene in horror and never ate flesh again.*

Conclusion:

*People adopt vegetarian and vegan diets for different reasons, not necessarily out of horror, as my son did. Whatever their reasons for doing so, they can create a balanced, ethical diet.*

An *example* taken from local or world news events is another kind of illustration. This is the introduction and conclusion to a paper on urban growth problems in California:

Introduction:

*The city council recently approved six hundred new homes to go in on the east side of the city. The impacts are likely to be extreme, illustrating the problems all California cities face in managing growth.*

Conclusion:

*How well the city will cope with the increased traffic, pressure on schools, and impacts to the watershed is yet to be seen. But we are not alone in having to find solutions soon.*

A *composite illustration* is a made-up example. The advantage of a composite illustration is that it can be perfectly crafted to fit your point, illustrating extreme examples that are possible though not likely (“Suppose that...”), or distant consequences that are possible but not yet observed.

An *analogy* is an extended comparison between one thing and another, such as discussing the development of a balanced state budget in the terms of a household budget.

### Challenge

A *challenge* raises reader expectations and creates tension. It is appropriate for a thesis that calls for changes to be made in public policies or personal actions, for example in persuasive essays and argument papers:

### Introduction

*Chances are, if you live outside city limits in any of California's twenty-one rural counties, you couldn't use public transportation if you wanted to. There isn't any.*

### Conclusion:

*Certainly Californians need to get over their love affairs with their cars, and having better systems of public transportation in place would help.*

A *question* is another type of challenge:

### Introduction:

*Does it make sense to prohibit minors from carrying calamine lotion at school without a doctor's written permission, yet allow them to leave campus without parental knowledge or consent for invasive medical procedures?*

### Conclusion:

*Even more than many of the absurd zero-tolerance laws in place in our schools, this one should be abandoned. Does it make sense? Obviously not.*

Note that a question is an introductory strategy, *not* a thesis statement. A thesis statement should *answer* the question (and in some detail—not just “yes” or “no”).

## Quote

Make use of online quotation banks, which are a great source for quotations on practically any subject. A quote can be conventional, or it can be offbeat or unexpected:

### Introduction:

*Albert Einstein once said, “Any man who can drive safely while kissing a pretty girl is simply not giving the kiss the attention it deserves.”*

### Conclusion:

*It doesn't take an Einstein to realize that cell phones are not the first, nor will they be the last, driving distraction. We don't need more restrictions on cell phones; we just need better drivers.*

Song lyrics or familiar sayings sometimes make good introductions. But do avoid jargon and clichés. Furthermore, if a quote draws on jargon familiar only to a particular group, you have to provide some context for readers who are unfamiliar with it:

### Introduction:

*Computer programmers have a saying: “Garbage in, garbage out.” By this they mean that the results of a program are only as good as the human input that creates and runs the program.*

### Conclusion:

*The next time you read the results of the latest poll, consider the polling method, the sample, and the source, and remember, “Garbage in, garbage out.”*

## Compare or contrast

*Comparison* shows similarities and creates a sense of familiarity. *Contrast* shows differences and creates tension and expectation. (You do *not* have to be writing a compare/contrast paper to use this as an introduction strategy.) For example, this is a contrast intro to a personal narrative:

Introduction:

*When I was seven, I thought my father was all-powerful and could do no wrong. When I was seventeen, I thought he was a jerk.*

Conclusion:

*My father wasn't the god he seemed when I was seven, but now I know he was a lot better and wiser than I thought he was when I was seventeen.*

## **Define**

A *definition* can make a good introduction. You don't have to be writing a definition paper to use definition as an introduction strategy. You can use a standard dictionary if you want, but consider using books of quotations or online quotation banks for more interesting definitions:

Introduction:

*Here is how Ambrose Bierce defines a conservative: "Conservative. Noun. A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from a liberal, who wishes to replace them with others."*

Conclusion:

*When it comes to agricultural subsidies, we are better off sticking with existing evils than replacing them with others that promise far worse results.*

Another interesting use of definition is to use it as a starting point to *re-define* something in your own terms:

Introduction:

*Webster says friendship is mutual feelings of trust, affection, assistance, and approval between people. However, I say sometimes friendship is knowing when to walk away.*

Conclusion:

*Refusing to help was the biggest favor Marisa ever did for me.*

## **Make a provocative or startling statement**

If the provocative statement is someone else's, treat it as a quotation. If the provocative statement is statistical, make sure you cite the source. If you have a way with words or an insight all your own, by all means use that:

Introduction:

*It is ridiculous and immoral to allow congress people to vote themselves pay raises.*

Conclusion:

*Restricting the ability of congress people to vote themselves raises would go a long way to restoring morality and a sense of public service to the public servants.*

Using a single strategy for both introduction and conclusion creates a sense of closure. When you begin to think of introductions and conclusions as two pieces of a single puzzle, you will probably find them easier to write.

*Contributed by Rosemary McKeever*



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