

## Writing Introduction and Conclusion

Introductory and concluding paragraphs function together as the frame around the argument of your essay. Or, using the visual image of book-ends holding the books – the body of your essay – together. It is important to write the introduction and the conclusion in one sitting, so that they match in mirror image to create a complete framework.

### The Introductory Paragraph

When you've finished writing the middle paragraphs, the body of your essay, and you're satisfied that the argument or case you've presented adequately supports your thesis statement, you're now ready to write your introduction.

#### **The introduction**

- Introduces the topic of your essay,
- 'Welcomes' the reader with a general statement that engages their interest or that they can agree with,
- Sets the scene for the discussion in the body of the essay,
- Builds up to the thesis statement,
- Prepares the reader for the thesis statement and your argument or case, but does not introduce points of argument,
- Concludes with the thesis statement.

**In preparing the reader for the thesis statement, there are many approaches in writing an introduction that can be taken. The following are just a few:**

- Provide historical background,
- Outline the present situation,
- Define terms,
- State the parameters of the essay,
- Discuss assumptions,
- Present a problem.

The following examples from Model Essays One and Two show how introductory paragraphs are developed.

#### **Model Essay One - introductory paragraph**

##### **Keys to a Successful Essay**

Many students find essay writing difficult and frustrating.<sup>1</sup> They know what they want to say, but when it comes to expressing themselves through the essay medium, they encounter problems.<sup>2</sup> Not only do they have to address the complexities of their topic, but they also have to follow the conventions of the formal academic essay.<sup>3</sup> The task seems daunting.<sup>4</sup> Broken down into its basic components, however, essay writing is not so difficult.<sup>5</sup> In fact, by addressing three key elements, every student can write an effective essay.<sup>6</sup> These three key elements are focus, organisation, and clarity.<sup>7</sup>

## Analysis

The **first six sentences** in this introductory paragraph prepare the reader for the thesis statement in sentence 7 that the three key elements of a successful essay are ‘**focus, organisation, and clarity**’

1. **Sentence 1** makes the generalisation that students ‘find essay writing difficult and frustrating’, and
2. **Sentences 2 and 3** expand on this generalisation.
3. **Sentence 4** reinforces the idea of difficulty.
4. **Sentence 5** turns the paragraph away from the difficulties of essay writing towards a way of addressing the difficulties by breaking the essay into components. (*The word ‘however’ signals this change of direction.*)
5. **Sentence 6** suggests that there are three of these components, preparing the way for the thesis statement that ‘focus, organisation, and clarity’ are these components.

In the Introductory paragraph, you are drawing the reader along a path: from general statements to the specifics.



## Title

Just as the introductory paragraph is written after the argument or case of the middle paragraphs has been written, so the title is written after the essay is completed. In this way, it can signpost what the reader can expect from the essay as a whole.

### Model Essay Two - introductory paragraph

#### The Relevance of Essay Writing

Although the essay as a genre of writing has a history going back over several hundred years, essay writing is still a common assessment task in most university courses.<sup>1</sup> The modern academic essay is very different from the earliest essays, but it shares with them important characteristics.<sup>2</sup> Essays are still short pieces of prose presenting the writer’s perspective on a topic, and supporting this perspective with sound evidence and logical argument.<sup>3</sup> In an academic environment essay writing requires from students a high investment of time, effort, and intellectual engagement, but the learning dividends are also high.<sup>4</sup> The essay continues to be a valuable learning and assessment medium.<sup>5</sup>

Note that the thesis statement has been re-worded, picking up the idea from the first sentence that the essay has had a long history in the phrase ‘**continues to be**’ and strengthening ‘valid’ to ‘**valuable**’.

## Analysis

The **first four sentences** in this introductory paragraph prepare the reader for the thesis statement in **sentence 5** that the essay ‘continues to be a valuable learning and assessment medium’.

1. **Sentence 1** makes the generalisation that despite the age of the genre, essays are still set as assessment tasks.
2. **Sentence 2** notes that the genre has changed but some characteristics remain, and;
3. **Sentence 3** lists some of these characteristics.

4. **Sentence 4** asserts essay writing is demanding, but the ‘learning dividends are high’, which leads into the thesis statement.



It is easier to write the title and introductory paragraph last because by then you know what is coming in the rest of the essay.

### The Concluding Paragraph:

The concluding paragraph completes the frame around the essay’s argument, which was opened in the introductory paragraph.

### The conclusion

- Begins by restating the thesis,
- Should be a mirror image of the first paragraph,
- Sums up the essay as a whole,
- Contextualises the argument in a wider scope, but does not introduce new points,
- Leaves the reader with a sense of completion.

The following examples from Model Essays One and Two show how concluding paragraphs are developed.

### Model Essay One - concluding paragraph

Clearly then, focus, organisation, and clarity are the three key elements of a successful essay.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the content must also be sound and the essay must appropriately meet the requirements of the assignment brief, but this is not enough to gain the highest grades.<sup>2</sup> Student essay writers must therefore work at developing strong thesis statements, planning the structure of their essays, and writing clearly and concisely.<sup>3</sup> Essay writing is never easy, but by addressing the three key elements of focus, organisation, and clarity, every student can succeed.<sup>4</sup>

### Analysis

1. **Sentence 1** restates the thesis that focus, organisation, and clarity are the key elements of a successful essay. The phrase ‘Clearly then’ implies that, having read the case for focus, organisation, and clarity being identified as the ‘key elements’, the reader agrees with the thesis.
2. **Sentence 2** acknowledges the importance of the essay’s content but asserts that sound content isn’t enough for success.
3. **Sentence 3** sums up the points made in the middle three paragraphs.
4. **Sentence 4** restates the generalisation the essay started with – that students find essay writing difficult – but then ends on a high note with the prediction that addressing the key elements discussed in the middle paragraphs will ensure success.

## Model Essay Two - concluding paragraph

Bringing together such a wide range of learning experiences, the essay remains an excellent medium of learning as well as of assessment.<sup>1</sup> It encourages students to undertake deep rather than surface learning and gives lecturers an opportunity to provide insightful feedback.<sup>2</sup> It also develops the transferable skills graduates need in the professional workplace, and, most importantly, it presents students with an intellectual challenge that can be met only by developing sophisticated ways of thinking and communicating.<sup>3</sup> The essay may have a long history, but its relevance to the university learning experience continues.<sup>4</sup>

### Analysis

1. **Sentence 1** restates the thesis that the essay continues to be a valuable learning and assessment medium.
2. **Sentences 2 and 3** summarise the main points of the middle three paragraphs.
3. **Sentence 4** picks up the reference to the age of the essay genre, with which the essay begins, but then affirms the essay's continuing relevance.

