

# A Review of Introduction and Conclusion Paragraphs

## The introductory paragraph

### The objectives of an introductory paragraph

- Introduce the main point.
- Get the reader to start thinking about the thesis.
- Make the reader want to read the essay.

### The features of a good introductory paragraph

- Not too long.
- Simple (not complex or difficult; faulty language can make it difficult).
- No points which form the body of the essay.
- Every sentence (including the first sentence) is relevant to the thesis (not just to the topic).
- Each sentence leads one step closer to the thesis statement.
- Has originality; stimulates the reader.

## Introduction techniques

The first paragraph in an essay is called the introductory paragraph. Its purpose is two-fold: to introduce the subject of the essay, and to get the reader's attention. Here are some introductory techniques. <sup>1</sup>

### **Dramatize or present part of an anecdote.**

(Refer to YIC, pg.61 A.) In the opening two to three sentences of your introduction, it is impossible to tell very much about anything, much less a complete story, but you can present a representative part of it if you plan carefully. The part might consist of a glimpse of someone or something you will discuss later in your composition but wish to characterize beforehand, or it might be a highlight or preview of an incident you will present in a more complete form in your discussion.

### **Begin with a quotation.**

You may find a statement in such sources as plays, novels, short stories, poems, songs, newspapers, and magazines that you think captures or sums up an idea better than you can. The statement, properly acknowledged and set within quotations marks, may get your compositions off to a good start. Be careful that the quotation is not too long. Long quotations do not make lively introductory paragraphs.

### **Surprise with an unexpected point of view.**

(Refer to YIC, pg.61-61 B.) One way to grab the reader's attention is begin your introduction with a point of view he doesn't expect or to contradict what you think he thinks is right or wrong. This kind of introduction is especially effective when you have exact facts and figures at your disposal.

### **Begin with a question.**

A rhetorical question is one to which no answer is expected or to which only one answer may be made—in this case, the answer presented in the thesis sentence. The rhetorical question is a device to attract reader participation, that is, to engage the reader in thinking actively about the question asked before he is led to the writer's conclusion that is stated in the thesis sentence. Use this technique with discretion. If you decide to begin your introduction with a question, make it a provocative and stimulating one.

## **Build background.**

(Refer also to YIC, pg.62 C and D.) Sometimes the most forceful way to lead to the thesis sentence is to present background information in a series of statements that steadily build toward and strengthen the thesis sentence. This method is effective because it involves the reader in the subject right from the beginning and continues to develop his interest until the climactic presentation of the thesis at the end of the introductory paragraph. This is perhaps one of the more difficult techniques because it calls for considerable knowledge of or experience with the subject as well as sensitivity and skill in building the paragraph with increasing intensity.

## **An Example**

One hundred years ago, an unhappy couple simply lived unhappily or tried to work out their problems. Divorce was an option that was never considered. Today, an unhappy couple easily decides that divorce is the answer to their problems. However, consider the harmful effects these “easy” divorces seem to be having on society. <sup>1</sup>

Note how the first step strongly hints at the essay’s theme, and the next two sentences moves one step closer to the essay’s thesis. [*Note: This thesis statement is incomplete: it doesn’t present the major parts of the essay.*]

## **The concluding paragraph**

### **The objectives of a concluding paragraph**

- Leave the reader with a clear understanding of your main idea.
- Leave reader with an appreciation of your main idea.
- Slow down the momentum.

### **The features of a good concluding paragraph**

- Is not too long.
- Is simple.
- Reminds the reader of the entire thesis (including its purpose and major parts).
- Is not just a dry, dead repetition of the thesis. It doesn’t use the same words to restate.
- Doesn’t introduce new ideas that want more discussion or distract the reader from the essay’s purpose and thesis.

## **Steps:<sup>2</sup>**

1. First sentence: a general statement to shift the reader’s perspective from specifics to whole.
2. Second (and third?) sentence: touch on major points from the thesis, or summarize the whole thing.
3. Last sentence: a relevant statement that provides a feeling of finality.

## **An example**

### **The Many Hats of Woody Allen<sup>1</sup>**

America would not be the same without Woody Allen and certainly American humor would not be. Allen has become famous as the neurotic New Yorker who always finds the worst-and the funniest-side of life. He has been tickling the American funny bone for over 25 years. In addition, he has been doing it under many different job titles.

Early in his career, Allen was a “behind the scenes” man. He wrote jokes and ideas for other people to perform. He worked for NBC radio and television performers. Some of the early TV

shows in the 1950's, such as Sid Caesar and Garry Moore, had Woody Allen jokes in them. Even though he wasn't a performer, he was gaining valuable experience.

In the early 1960's, while maintaining his writing, Allen became a performer. At first, he was a stand-up comedian. He played to small and large audiences and was even on "The Tonight Show." Later on, he began writing plays and then being an actor in them. One of his most famous plays was *Play It Again, Sam*, which was a neurotic's funny look at Humphrey Bogart's effect on his life. He also began acting in films. In most of these, he was a writer as well as an actor.

In the 1970's, Allen found that he liked another job—directing people in movies. Of course, he never stopped writing or performing. He just added one more job to the overall project of making a movie. One of the most famous movies in which he wrote the screenplay, acted in the lead role and directed was *Annie Hall*. While the movie was overall a serious study of intellectual society in New York, many scenes provided comic—while sarcastic—relief. This movie won an Oscar as the best movie of 1977, and Allen won in the same year as best director. He had, indeed, become a success at three different jobs.

All in all, Americans are lucky to have Woody Allen. For more than a quarter of a century, he has been making us laugh by doing what he does best in each of the many jobs—writer, comedian and director—he has had. Long live Woody Allen and his sense of humor.

Note the concluding paragraph's first sentence (step 1), how it avoids explicitly mentioning the main idea or major supporting ideas, while still hinting at the theme of the essay. The second sentence reminds the reader of the essay's main point and the major points that support the main point. And the last sentence is general again, but still relevant, and it gives a feeling of finality.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> From *You're in Charge!*, by Gro Frydenberg and Cynthia A. Boardman; Addison-Wesley Publishing Company

<sup>2</sup> From *Paragraph Practice*, by Kathleen E. Sullivan; Macmillan Publishing Co., New York