

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Writing an introduction paragraph is one of the hardest parts of writing an essay. The purpose of the introduction is to let the readers know what you will be talking about and make them interested in reading your essay. If you are having a lot of trouble getting started, try writing the body paragraphs first. After writing them, your ideas will be flowing, you will feel like your essay is almost finished, and you will be more relaxed and able to tackle the introduction.

There are a number of different ways to start an essay. Many of them involve the strategy of moving from a general opening statement to more specific ideas that lead to your thesis statement at the end of the paragraph. Some of the more common methods of writing an introduction are described below. The first 2 methods listed seem to work well with just about any topic you might be given. These 2 methods also seem to give students the fewest problems. If you are unsure which method to use, try one of the first 2 in this list.

**NOTE:** After the description of each method, there is a sample paragraph to demonstrate the method. Each of the sample paragraphs in this handout was based on the following information:

Thesis statement: All college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.  
First Topic (MP1): Learn the basic parts  
Second Topic (MP2): Lose the fear  
Third Topic (MP3): Learn common software  
Conclusion: All college students should be required to take a computer class.

Here is a list of the methods described in this handout:

| <b>Introductions</b>                      | <b>Conclusions</b>   |
|---|--|
| 1. Give <u>other</u> reasons              | 1. Conclusion statement – main points – clincher               |
| 2. Present the other side of the argument | 2. General statement – main points – conclusion statement      |
| 3. Tell a relevant story                  | 3. Tell the end of the relevant story used in the introduction |
| 4. Ask a thought-provoking question       | 4. Make suggestions for future actions                         |
| 5. Start with a relevant quotation        |  |

## 1. **Give other reasons**

You may have many reasons to support your argument, but in the body of your essay you will focus on only 3 of them. You can use your introduction to present the other reasons (the ones you will not be talking about), leading up to your thesis statement at the end of the paragraph. Be careful: You can not mention your 3 main reasons until you get to your thesis statement, and you can not mention in your introduction any of the major or minor supporting details you will be using in your body paragraphs.

### **SAMPLE:**

Computers can be very valuable tools, so knowing as much as possible about them gives people a strong advantage. Many jobs today rely on computers for writing papers, developing spreadsheets, preparing slide presentations, and handling a host of other tasks. Personal activities such as getting drivers' licenses and voting often involve computers. Computers have become so user-friendly that they are very easy to use. The computer puts a wealth of information at one's fingertips and also facilitates easy communication with others. The computer really has become an integral part of people's lives. Therefore, all college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.

## 2. **Present the other side of the argument**

Your essay will defend one side of your argument or one point of view. However, there is usually another (opposite) point of view that can be developed. Pretend that you are arguing about your topic with someone who takes the other side: What would that person say? What reasons would that person give to support his point of view? Use your introduction to present those other points. Then use a transition word from the "Contrast" category to switch over to your thesis statement. (Being able to acknowledge that there is another side to your argument is one of the signs of a more advanced essay.)

### **SAMPLE:**

My friend Jim does not want to take a computer class. He says that he already knows everything he needs to know about using computers. He also does not want to give up the time or credits such a course would take; he would rather take another class in his major. Jim thinks that the computer classes are just a waste of time because no one uses what the classes teach. He says he will never need to know how to set up a computer or learn what the different parts of the computer do. However, computers have become integral parts of many jobs and personal activities. It really is very important for people to be as knowledgeable as possible when it comes to using computers in order to compete in today's society. Therefore, all college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.

### 3. **Tell a relevant story**

If you have a story that relates *directly* to your argument, you can tell it in your introduction. You might even tell part of it in the introduction and finish it up in the conclusion. However, you have to be careful when using this method: You don't want to get so carried away with telling the story that you forget the point of the essay. You also have to have a smooth way to move to your thesis statement by the end of the paragraph. Keep in mind that you have to make the readers understand the relevance of the story – don't make them guess why you are telling it and don't let the story take you too far away from the purpose of your essay.

#### **SAMPLE:**

##### **[Introduction paragraph – starting the story and giving the thesis statement]**

Personal computers did not become popular until I started high school. All of my friends were eager to learn how to use a computer. They attended classes at the computer store and begged their parents to buy them a computer. On the other hand, I did not want to have anything to do with computers. I did not understand the benefits of computers and thought they would be too hard to use. I was quite content with my familiar pen and typewriter. Then I watched my college roommate type a research paper on the computer and saw how easy it was for her to make changes and format her document. Now, I believe that all college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.

##### **[Conclusion paragraph – finishing the story]**

My reluctance to learn how to use computers seems silly to me now. Many of my daily activities involve computers, and I rely on email to communicate with my family, friends, and co-workers. When I think about typing research papers on a typewriter now, I realize how much harder it was for students to prepare their assignments when I was growing up. The more students understand about using computers, the better off they will be. Therefore, all college students should be required to take a computer class.

### 4. **Ask a thought-provoking question**

A good question can get your readers to think about your topic as they start to read your essay. If done well, this method can be useful. You can even ask a few questions if you need to, but you will have to work your way to your thesis statement no matter how many questions you include.

#### **SAMPLE:**

Do you know an easy way to make a table on the computer? Do you understand how a CPU works? Have you ever tried to create a pie chart or to change its appearance? College students may need to know how to do all of these procedures. It is important for them to learn how to make the most effective use of the computer to complete their assignments. Therefore, all college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.

## 5. **Start with a relevant quotation**

If you know a famous quotation that is directly related to your point of view and your topic, you might want to use it to start your introduction. While this method can be very effective, you have to be careful. The reader will expect the quotation to be accurate, and you may have to include the name of the person who said it. Therefore, you may be able to include the quote only if you are writing your essay outside of class and have time to search for the correct information. On the other hand, this method may not be a good choice on a test or an in-class essay because you may not remember the quotation or the speaker accurately. Using a quotation that is not accurate will be worse than not using it at all, so be very careful if you decide to try this option.

### **SAMPLE:**

According to Bill Gates, "computers, like electricity, will play a role in almost everything you do." This statement suggests that if people are to be able to succeed, they must understand all they can about computers. Students are particularly in need of such understanding: For most students these days, their grades depend on their ability to use computers to fulfill class requirements. It is to their advantage for them to learn all they can about using the machines. For that reason, all college students should be required to take a computer class to learn the basic parts, lose their fear of using computers, and learn common software programs.

Once you conquer your fear of introductions, you can experiment with these and many other methods to attract your readers' attention and make them want to read your paper.



Turn to the next page for information on writing conclusion paragraphs.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the conclusion paragraph is to wrap up your essay. You must leave the readers with the feeling that you are finished with your argument and that you have come to an end. As with introductions, there are many ways to write a conclusion. This handout shows you a few of the more common methods. (The **NOTE** on page 1 of this handout reviews the basis for the samples.)

**NOTE:** No matter which method you use, you should NEVER introduce any new ideas into your conclusion paragraph. After all, this paragraph is supposed to help you wrap up your ideas, not take the readers off into something new.

One helpful way to end your essay is to refer back to your thesis statement in some fashion by writing a **conclusion statement** that reminds the readers of your reason for writing (the main idea of your entire essay, or what you are trying to prove). You do not ever want to repeat any sentence word for word, but you can rephrase your basic argument. You can also write a separate sentence for each of your 3 main points. Here are 2 ways to use a conclusion statement:

### 1. **Conclusion statement --- main points --- clincher**

In this method, your first sentence is your conclusion statement. Then you write a separate sentence for each of your 3 main points, in the same order in which you discussed them in the essay. Your last sentence is a “clincher” sentence that finishes the paper.

#### **SAMPLE:**

All college students should be required to take a computer class. They have to learn the basic parts of the computer so they can understand how the machines work. Students also need to lose their fear of using computers so they can become willing to try new tasks. Finally, students need to learn how to use common software programs that will help them complete their assignments effectively. A computer class can become a college student's best investment.

### 2. **General statement --- main points --- conclusion statement**

In this method, your first sentence is a general statement that introduces the topic you wrote about. Then you write a separate sentence for each of your 3 main points, in the same order in which you discussed them in the essay. Your last sentence is your conclusion statement which finishes your essay by reminding your readers about the main argument your essay was supporting.

#### **SAMPLE:**

College students have to learn many things, but few skills are as important as learning about computers. Students have to learn the basic parts of the computer so they can understand how the machines work. Students also need to lose their fear of using computers so they can become willing to try new tasks. Finally, students need to learn how to use common software programs that will help them complete their assignments effectively. ~~All college students should be required to take a computer class.~~

### 3. **Tell the end of the relevant story used in the introduction**

(See explanation and example on page 3 of this handout packet.)

#### 4. **Make suggestions for future actions**

Use your main points as the basis for making suggestions to your readers about relevant steps that should be taken or important issues that still need to be addressed. Be careful when using this option, however: You might easily lose track of your topic. Even though this method can be very effective, if you do not use it properly you can ruin an otherwise good essay.

#### **SAMPLE:**

When developing their plans of study, college students should be required to include at least one computer class. However, they really need to consider the types of careers they are going to pursue. What computer skills will they be required to have? Students should also consider future technology: What skills will computer users need to know in a few years? What new programs are being developed now? After considering these and many other questions, college students may realize that one computer class will not be enough!



#### **FINAL REMINDERS:**

- There are many other ways to end your essay, but many students feel comfortable starting out with one of the methods described above. Make sure that you give the readers the feeling that you have finished your argument.
- Do not mention any new ideas in the conclusion: You want to wrap up your paper, not make the readers start thinking about something new.
- Do not “copy and paste” any of the sentences you used earlier in your paper. You can repeat an idea if you have to, but you should word it differently.