

# Introductions and Conclusions

## Effective Introductions

An effective introduction arouses the reader's interest and indicates the subject and tone of the essay. Introductions vary in length, but most papers over four pages have introductions containing two or even three paragraphs. The first paragraph, called the "hook," grabs the audience's interest and then focuses gradually until it points at the essay's general direction. The main paragraph, or "thesis," plans what the essay will say, explains how it will prove this, and ends with the thesis statement. A "background" paragraph, focusing on audience or some other context may also be necessary. You can write the "hooks" of introductions in a number of ways. This list is in an order of effectiveness, simplest to most engaging.

### 1. Background information

*Anyone new to the experience of owning a lawn, as I am, soon figures out that there is more at stake here than a patch of grass. A lawn immediately establishes a certain relationship with one's neighbors and, by extension, the larger American landscape. Mowing the lawn, I realized the first time I gazed into my neighbor's yard and imagined him gazing back into mine, is a civic responsibility.*

**Michael Pollan**, "Why Mow? The Case Against Lawns"

### 2. Fact or detail (unusual or appropriate)

*A new Census Bureau report predicts that there will be 383 million Americans in the year 2050. That's 128 million more than there are now, and 83 million more than the bureau was predicting just four years ago, when it appeared that the U.S. population would peak and stabilize at around 300 million.*

**Michael Kinsley**, "Gatecrashers"

### 3. Statement (intriguing or controversial)

*After smiling brilliantly for nearly four decades, I now find myself trying to quit. Or, at the very least, seeking to lower the wattage a bit.*

**Amy Cunningham**, "Why Women Smile"

### 4. Rhetorical question (which you'll answer)

*In a series of futuristic commercials, AT&T paints a liberating picture of your not-too-distant life, when the information superhighway will be an instrument of personal freedom and a servant to your worldly needs and desires. But is the future of cyberspace really so elegant, so convenient? Or does it represent a serious threat to your privacy and your freedom?*

**Erik Ness**, [BigBrother@cyberspace](mailto:BigBrother@cyberspace)

## 5. Illustration (example of something)

*Libby Smith knows what it is like to be a victim of gay bashing. First, there were the harassing telephone calls to her home. Then, one evening last March as she went to get her book bag out of a locker at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, she was attacked by two men.*

**Mary Crystal Cage**, "Gay Bashing on Campus"

## 6. Quotation (from a substantial person)

*When the Reverend Jerry Falwell learned that the Supreme Court had reversed his \$200,000 judgment against Hustler magazine for the emotional distress he had suffered from an outrageous parody, his response was typical of those who seek to censor speech: 'Just as no person may scream 'Fire!' in a crowded theater when there is no fire, and find cover under the First Amendment, likewise, no sleazy merchant like Larry Flynt should be able to use the First Amendment as an excuse for maliciously and dishonestly attacking public figures, as he has so often done.'*

**Alan Dershowitz**, "Shouting 'Fire!'"

## 7. Narrative (a story or anecdote)

*As I walked out the street entrance to my newly rented apartment, a guy in maroon high-tops and a skateboard haircut approached, making kissing noises and saying, "Hi, gorgeous." Three weeks earlier, I would have assessed the degree of malice and made ready to run or tell him to bug off, depending. But now, instead, I smiled, and so did my four-year-old daughter, because after dozens of similar encounters I understood he didn't mean me but her.*

**Barbara Kingsolver**, "Somebody's Baby"

# Effective Conclusions

Conclusions are the last words that the reader sees, but some authors spend the least amount of time thinking about them, because the essay is already over. However, a bad conclusion can ruin an otherwise great essay. The conclusion often summarizes the main points very briefly and encourages the reader to action or further thought on the subject. For this reason, the main concepts should be clear in the body of the essay. An essay should not merely stop; it should finish with a sense of purpose and style. Some suggestions follow, which can be used individually or in tandem with each other.

### 1. Conclude by rephrasing the thesis.

*Such considerations make it clear that it's time for schools to choose between real amateurism and real professionalism. They can't have a little of both. From now on, in college sports, it's got to be poetry or pros.*

**Louis Barbash**, "Clean Up or Pay Up"

## **2. Direct the reader's attention to larger issues.**

*My antibody status does not matter to you. Certainly it matters--with absolute enormity--to me. But what I'd like you to remember is the blood on the subway, the click of the refrigerator door, the woman in black so elegant and uneasy, First Avenue at gritty, gorgeous dusk, the brilliance of that bad art in the examining room, the pores of the doctor's face--all of them declaring, by their very existence: As long and as well as you can, live, live.*

**David Groff**, "Taking the Test"

## **3. Encourage your readers to change their attitudes or to alter their actions.**

*Our medical care system is in trouble and getting worse. While the experts try to figure out how to achieve utopian goals at affordable prices, let's do something practical about the suffering on our doorsteps. Primary care is the most affordable safety net we can offer our citizens. By all means, let's continue the debate about universal, comprehensive insurance to cover all medical costs, but, in the meantime, let's provide primary health care to all uninsured Americans--now!*

**Gordon T. Moore**, "Caring for the Uninsured and Underinsured"

## **4. Conclude with a summary of the main points covered.**

*All our giving carries with it messages about ourselves, our feelings about those to whom we give, how we see them as people and how we phrase the ties of relationship. Christmas giving, in which love and hope and trust play such an intrinsic part, can be an annual way of telling our children that we think of each of them as a person, as we also hope they will come to think of us.*

**Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux**, "The Gift of Autonomy"

## **5. Clinch or stress the importance of the central idea by referring in some way to the introduction.**

### **Introduction**

*I read The National Enquirer when I want to feel exhilarated about life's possibilities. It tells me of a world where miracles still occur. In the world of The National Enquirer, UFOs flash over the Bermuda Triangle, cancer cures are imminent, ancient film stars at last find love that is for keeps. Reached on The Other Side by spiritualists, Clark Gable urges America to keep its chin up. Of all possible worlds, I like the world of The National Enquirer best...*

### **Conclusion**

*So I whoop with glee when a new edition of The National Enquirer hits the newsstands and step into the world where Gable can cheer me up from The Other Side.*

**Russell Baker**, "Magazine Rack"

*Examples from* Hodges, John C., et al. Harbrace College Handbook. Revised Brief Thirteenth Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.