

Basics

Written assignments begin with an introduction and finish with a conclusion. Although they are usually quite short (up to 150 words), effective introductions and conclusions can be difficult to get right. However, once you master the art of writing them, your writing will seem stylish and authoritative.

The academic context

A good introductory paragraph prepares the reader by setting out the topic that you will discuss, placing it in context and explaining why it is important. In an academic context, the introduction also usually contains a thesis statement, in which you tell the reader what you plan to argue.

A good concluding paragraph completes your essay by drawing together all of the arguments you have put forward. It leaves the reader with a strong idea of your opinion on the topic, and gives them something to think about.

Key features

Introductions

The introduction of your essay will almost always end with a thesis statement, which sets up your essay with phrases such as *In this essay I will argue ... In this essay I will demonstrate ... In this essay I will discuss ...*

Before this, in order to draw the reader in, a well-written introduction often contains one or more of the following:

- some background information about the topic placing it in context, which the reader will need to understand your essay
- a personal story relating the topic to your own experiences
- a surprising fact or statistic that emphasizes how important the subject of your essay is
- a reference to a common misconception that your essay will discuss or try to disprove
- a quotation from a famous person, stating an opinion that you may argue for or against

Conclusions

Your conclusion should do more than just sum up the important arguments in your essay. A well-written conclusion often contains one or more of the following:

- a warning to readers of the consequences of not addressing the issues discussed in your essay
- a recommendation for a way of addressing a problem or making a change
- a quotation or expert opinion that adds authority to your stated conclusions
- a powerful image – a story, fact or use of figurative language to drive home the ultimate point of your paper
- a relevant personal reflection drawn from your research
- a call for further research into some of the issues addressed in your essay

Challenges / difficulties

Many students try to write the perfect introduction before they move onto the main body of their essay. However, when you are using word processing software, it is often easier to write the introduction *after* you have completed the first draft of the main body of your essay. That way, you have a clearer view of what your essay will say.

Writing conclusions is often difficult because you can feel like you are just repeating yourself. You can avoid this by rewording your ideas and drawing them together.

How can I develop this skill?

After attending a lecture, seminar or similar, write a conclusion giving the speaker's view. If a lot of different topics were discussed, or if more than one person contributed, writing a conclusion might be difficult! In this case, try writing a conclusion with your own opinion on the subject.

Learning outcome

When you have become skilled at writing introductions and conclusions you will score higher marks for your writing.

Theory to practice

Read the introduction to a student's essay. Then answer the questions that follow.

Is social media good or bad for young people?

The invention of social media has changed the world forever. Young people experience the world completely differently to all previous generations. As with all big changes, there are positive and negative sides to this development. Young people today feel more connected to the world, and each other, than ever before. However, social media is very addictive – recent research suggests that 5% of adolescents are addicted to social media platforms. Many spend more than 50 hours a week using social media. Social media use is linked to several very serious problems in young people, including mental health issues and cyberbullying. In this essay I will argue that the downsides of uncontrolled social media use in young people outweigh its positive effects.

- 1** Which of the listed Key features does the student use in their introduction?
- 2** What is the student's thesis statement?

Ways to get more practice

When you read online opinion articles or blogs, look at how the writer has introduced the topic and placed it in context for the reader. When you get to the end of the article, try covering up the last paragraph and predicting what you think the writer will say in the conclusion.