

Writing introductions & conclusions

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Introductions: Task 1

- What's the point in writing an introduction, never mind an *effective* one?
- *When* do *you* write it? (*not* 'when should you'!)
- Do you have any bad habits?



Why write an effective introduction?

- You need to make a good first impression
- The introduction is a roadmap of the essay
- The introduction will make people *want* to read your essay



Full introduction

- May be several paragraphs long
- May constitute an entire section of the essay
- Should fall within 5-20% of the total word count (although everyone says something different)



Full introduction

1. Identify the subject of the essay

Usually by making reference to the question that has been posed:

“This essay will examine...”



Full introduction

2. Act as a 'roadmap' to signpost the reader

The very simplest version of this is to highlight stages of argument:

“The first section will focus on...”



Full introduction

3. Highlight major debates lying 'behind' the question

Questions often centre on key debates, not explicitly referred to, but that lie 'behind' or be implied in the question asked.

E.g., if your topic is 'Is behaviour biologically or socially produced?' you might outline some of the debates surrounding both issues.



Full introduction

4. Define key terms for your reader

Imagine an educated but relatively uninformed reader. They might need to know:

- Key concepts and technical terms
- Terms that are contested
- Theories or approaches that have different versions

But nothing that you might consider 'obvious'.



Full introduction

5. Establish a position or 'thesis statement'

Indicate the particular line of argument that you will take.

This should clearly establish your position on this issue and anticipate or signal the content of the essay's conclusion.

"This essay explores the use of capital punishment in the USA"

is good, but:

"This essay explores the use of capital punishment in the USA and argues that it is a fundamental abuse of human rights"

is better.



Basic introduction

For very short essays, you need to be more concise and focussed:

- identify the subject of the essay and define key terms
- highlight any major debates that lie ‘behind’ the question or provide background information
- signpost the shape of the essay.



Task 2

Look at the two examples of student introductions.

In pairs, highlight as many of the five stages listed as possible.

1. Identify the subject of the essay
2. Act as a 'roadmap' to signpost the reader
3. Highlight major debates lying 'behind' the question
4. Define key terms
5. Establish a position or 'thesis statement'



Task 2

Extract 1

The capacity of human beings to acquire the diverse rules and grammar of a language is truly remarkable. People all over the world seem to begin to acquire language at around the same age and this is one of the factors that led Chomsky to create his innateness hypothesis. More specifically, Chomsky has argued that humans have some kind of genetical Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which is now replaced with the more accurate UG or 'Universal Grammar'. His theory is accepted by many contemporary psycholinguists and is most eloquently defended in Steven Pinker's book, *The Language Instinct*. While some researchers disagree with his views and there is evidence to support both sides, I will argue that Chomsky's beliefs are well-supported and very influential in the history of psycholinguistics.



Task 2

Extract 1

[identifies subject:] The capacity of human beings to acquire the diverse rules and grammar of a language is truly remarkable. People all over the world seem to begin to acquire language at around the same age and this is one of the factors that led Chomsky to create his innateness hypothesis. **[defines terms (very broadly!):]** More specifically, Chomsky has argued that humans have some kind of genetical Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which is now replaced with the more accurate UG or 'Universal Grammar'. **[major debates:]** His theory is accepted by many contemporary psycholinguists and is most eloquently defended in Steven Pinker's book, The Language Instinct. **[establishes a position:]** While some researchers disagree with his views and there is evidence to support both sides, I will argue that Chomsky's beliefs are well-supported and very influential in the history of psycholinguistics.



Task 2

Extract 2

The tradition of second language teaching was for centuries based on one classical method, which enjoyed absolute and unquestionable authority until the turn of the nineteenth century and which in some societies still remains the synonym for satisfactory language teaching. The twentieth century, however, turned into a training ground for the many 'best ways' of teaching a foreign language, as a result of intensive research and constant changes in the field of second language acquisition theories. In the last few decades, many Second Language Acquisition researchers have been advocating for yet another shift. The communicative or functional approach is believed by many to provide the best model for teaching a foreign language.

In this essay, I will attempt to place the communicative approach within a broader context of second language teaching theory and practice. I will also discuss the decisive factors underlying teaching trends in [name of country] state schools with respect to the communicative approach.



Task 2

Extract 2

The tradition of second language teaching was for centuries based on one classical method, which enjoyed absolute and unquestionable authority until the turn of the nineteenth century and which in some societies still remains the synonym for satisfactory language teaching. **[debates:]** The twentieth century, however, turned into a training ground for the many ‘best ways’ of teaching a foreign language, as a result of intensive research and constant changes in the field of second language acquisition theories. In the last few decades, many Second Language Acquisition researchers have been advocating for yet another shift. The *communicative or functional* approach is believed by many to provide the best model for teaching a foreign language.

[subject, shape and content:] In this essay, I will attempt to place the communicative approach within a broader context of second language teaching theory and practice. I will also discuss the decisive factors underlying teaching trends in (name of country) state schools with respect to the communicative approach.



Hooks

- Quotation
- Anecdote
- Rhetorical question
- Interesting fact
- Simile or metaphor



Conclusions: Task 3

- What is the point of writing a conclusion to your essay? What function does it serve?



Essay conclusion

- Recaps the key points in your argument or summarise the key debates raised by the question and synthesise them
- Provides a final condensed version of the essay's core argument that restates your position on your question
- Provides an answer or response to the question posed



Longer conclusion

- Suggest implications for the findings and raise some proposals
- Concede limitations of your research
- Suggest ideas for further research



Introduction & conclusion alignment

When you are drafting your essay, always read your introductions and conclusions one after the other to see if they 'match' each other



Warning!

- Not all essays contain traditional conclusions
- Some essays, especially longer ones, dissertations and theses, may have sections called 'discussion' or 'concluding remarks'



Task 4

Read the list of extracts from the conclusions and match them with the list of functions in the box.



Task 4

- i) summary of main body: a, e, f
- ii) limitations of research: b
- iii) suggestions for further research: d, g
- iv) implications and proposals: c



Task 5

Bearing in mind what you know about conclusions, talk to your neighbour and comment on the following short student example:

In conclusion, deposit insurance schemes should be designed in a manner so that they discourage, to some extent, the taking of moral risks whilst enhancing the effectiveness of safety nets. Based on what has been discussed in this paper, I would disagree with the current conventional wisdom surrounding deposit insurance.

The study focused on a theoretical presentation of the ineffectiveness of deposit insurance and thus further research in this area could be conducted to assess the relationship between deposit insurance and moral hazard. This could be carried out by conducting detailed empirical research testing the effectiveness of both explicit and implicit deposit insurance in relation to moral hazard.

