Composing the Draft

Introductions

The introduction offers your readers a statement of purpose and an overview of what is to come. As the first impression you make on your reader, the introduction must be well crafted and suited to the purpose of the paper. For most academic papers, the introduction comprises about 10% of the entire paper. The introduction must accomplish three main tasks. It must

- show the reader that there is a problem or explain the context for an issue;
- let the reader know the thesis (point of argument or purpose) and emphasize the implications of this claim; and
- state your intended route or "roadmap" (the elements of your analysis in the order you develop them).

As you work through the paper, you should constantly revise and refine your introduction to ensure that it accurately reflects your purpose. As you write the introduction, consider the following questions:

What problem does the paper seek to address? For example, you may be writing to expose a gap in current knowledge, to address an often overlooked element in current thinking, to argue for a change, or to explore what may happen if there is no change. You may be writing to argue what a particular element in a novel contributes to our understanding of the whole, or you may be writing to synthesize information from a range of sources on a particular topic.
What is the solution to this problem? The thesis is your solution to the problem. The implications of your claim should be evident.

How does your analysis change how the readers see your topic? For example, how does your analysis of a symbol in a novel alter how readers see the main character, or what does the answer to your research question reveal about how we structure organizations, or how does your experiment influence the way readers understand human behaviour?

What is the most effective way to present the solution to this audience? How can you categorize the details of your argument? What strategy will be most effective? The intended route must be clear and must accurately reflect the order of ideas in the presentation that follows.

Where am I now in the writing process? Should I return to the planning stage, conduct further research, continue writing, or edit what I have written?

Body Paragraphs

The paragraphs in the body of your paper should develop and provide evidence for the thesis you have offered in the introduction. Each paragraph has a specific purpose in developing your thesis, a purpose that is presented to the reader in a topic sentence. The rest of the paragraph serves to develop this idea with evidence from primary and secondary sources. As you undergo the process of writing the body paragraphs, consider the following questions:

What is each paragraph meant to do? What point is it meant to develop? How is it tied to the thesis?
How can I construct the paragraph in such a way that the reader is convinced that the information is correct? What evidence will I use? Can I support my contention with evidence from secondary sources?

How can I arrange my points in the most effective way? Is this paper strongest with points proceeding chronologically? Thematically? Strongest to weakest points or weakest to strongest? Cause and effect?

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Conclusions

The conclusion reaffirms your paper’s position, offers a brief restatement of your thesis, and draws together the main points. The conclusion should particularly emphasize the implications of your analysis or findings. Leave your reader with a clear understanding of what you have contributed to our understanding of your subject.

Without an effective introduction and conclusion, your paper cannot be focused and well organized. A weak introduction pulls the reader too quickly into the content of the paper and leaves them asking the question, “What’s the point?” If a paper lacks a strong conclusion, your essay just trails off and does not bring the argument to a logical conclusion.
As you write the conclusion, ask yourself the following questions:

What problem initiated the discussion in this paper, and what solution, or thesis, did I propose? Is this a logical outcome of the evidence I have presented in the body of the paper?

What are the implications of my thesis? What did I contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate through this discussion? Or, what did I offer my reader that changes how the audience understands this problem or issue?

Where am I now in the writing process? Should I return to the planning stage, conduct further research, continue writing, or edit what I have written?