

Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph is often called a “funnel” paragraph. In this technique, the introduction works like a funnel, with a wide opening at the top representing the most general statements, then narrowing until the thesis slips out the bottom. The principle is to start with a broad topic sentence and narrow down the topic sentence-by-sentence until the end of the introductory paragraph. The paragraph should end with the thesis statement for the research project. By starting with a broad topic sentence, the writer starts with what the reader should already know and moves toward what the reader doesn't know, but should know after reading the paper. The thesis statement connects known and unknown—a bridge to new knowledge.

Format

A. The introductory sentence(s) should be **general or generic statements** concerning the topic about which you are writing. This provides background information on the topic. **Unless your teacher approves, the introductory sentence(s) should not be a quote or a question.**

B. Following the introductory sentence(s), write the **author/book statement** which introduces the book on which you are reporting. This sentence must contain the author's full name and the title of the book (underlined). When you refer to the author later in your paper, you are allowed to use just his or her last name. A brief description of the story or the author's purpose in writing the book may be used here. Save the more detailed descriptions of plot or characterization for body paragraphs.

C. The introductory paragraph should conclude with the **thesis statement**. This is a statement of your controlling purpose in writing the essay. From your reading of the book you have formed ideas, beliefs, and conclusions about the topic and your thesis is a statement of those conclusions. Each point or component of your thesis statement should correspond to the topic of each body paragraph to follow the introduction. **Caution: Your thesis statement and all writing in the paper should be in THIRD person. English teachers do not want to see essays written in FIRST or SECOND person. Take yourself out of your writing and keep it impersonal and objective. Rather than stating your opinions or beliefs, state your information as FACTS.**

Example (from an Of Mice or Men essay):

During the Great Depression of the 1930's, many thousands of people in this country lost their jobs and their homes, when farms and businesses failed and unemployment and poverty exploded. As a result, many were “set adrift” to wander and to seek work in strange places. There was a great deal of loneliness and isolation among these drifters, and many sought companions and friends to help them through these tough times. In his novel, Of Mice and Men, set in the 1930's, John Steinbeck portrayed several of these lonely, drifting characters who were struggling under the difficult times of the Great Depression. The story illustrates the emotions, hopes, and disappointments of the principal characters. In particular, Steinbeck uses the struggles and the dreams of several inhabitants and workers on a California ranch, Crooks, Lennie, George, and Curley's wife, to dramatize the tough times of the 1930's.

See reverse for Concluding Paragraph → →

Concluding Paragraph

This paragraph is sometimes referred to as a “reverse funnel” approach. This paragraph has a construction opposite that of your introductory paragraph, where you started out with general, broad statements and narrowed down to a thesis statement. In the “reverse funnel” you start with a narrow focus (a restatement of or reference to your thesis),

For many people, the conclusion is the most difficult paragraph to write because everything you wanted to say has been stated in the body of the essay. What's left? The conclusion takes the reader from the individual points you made in the body of the essay and puts the whole paper into perspective, tying it up, so to speak. Some writers call it "putting a frame" around the essay so that the reader feels a sense of completion. A conclusion unifies the paper and balances the introduction. The function of the conclusion is to make sense of the paper.

Format

A. The opening sentence(s) of your concluding paragraph could be a brief restatement or paraphrase of the thesis of the paper. By referring to your thesis you remind your reader of what you set out to discuss or prove in your thesis. **Caution: Do not start this paragraph with a statement such as “In conclusion...” Be more creative in calling your reader’s attention to the fact that your essay is nearing its wrap-up. See example below.**

B. Then summarize your supporting points, with reference to the author and book title.

C. Write a strong concluding statement. This sentence should be a statement of your conclusions or message from having read the book. Some people call the concluding statement the “take home message”...the facts or truths about your paper that you want your reader to remember. The concluding statement could be thought-provoking, giving your reader a kernel of truth or reality on which they can reflect. Write your concluding statement in the same way that a preacher or motivational speaker might deliver his or her final message: “This is what I want you to remember. Take this away and use it!” **Remember to word your conclusion as fact and not as opinion.**

Example (from a To Kill A Mockingbird essay):

Perhaps most important of all, having seen the unfairness and narrow-mindedness of bigotry and snobbishness in their town, it seems almost certain that the children will judge others based on the decency with which they treat people, not on the color of their skin or their social standing in the community. Harper Lee has skillfully used the characters and incidents in To Kill A Mockingbird to paint a picture of bigotry and to send a message of tolerance. Surely someday someone will say of Jem and Scout that they are the people who are willing to do the town’s unpleasant jobs, just like Atticus. The experiences and responses of Jem, Scout, and Atticus can serve as a lesson to all people to look beyond the surface in judging their fellow man.

See reverse for Introductory Paragraph → →