

## WRITING EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Svetlana FILIPP,  
*Universitatea de Stat „Alecu Russo” din Bălți*

**Abstract:** Unul dintre cele mai importante aspecte în predarea scrisului academic este dezvoltarea deprinderilor de scriere a introducerii și a concluziei unui eseu. Articolul dat prezintă cele mai efective procedee, care pot fi utilizate și, în același timp, acele strategii, care trebuie evitate în scrierea paragrafelor de introducere și de concluzie.

**Key-words:** academic writing, writing skills, essay, strategies, technique, introductory and concluding paragraphs, thesis statement.

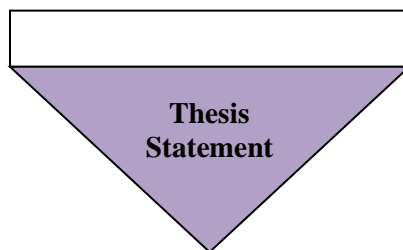
It is of primary importance in academic writing to help students acquire the technique of developing efficient and powerful introductions and conclusions. Quite often student writers are not able to develop proper, convincing introductions and logical conclusions resulting from the content of the essay. Usually student writers use a generalization in circles, repeating it over and over thus, doing little to inform or to persuade the reader, focusing him/her on the main item(s) that are going to be discussed in the essay. Also, in the majority of cases students' conclusions merely repeat the main ideas of the essay using the exact formulations of the essay's topic sentences or, in writing their conclusions students rewrite the information from the introduction merely rewording it. Considering the above stated, the present article focuses on the strategies and techniques that can help academic writing students develop effective introductory and concluding paragraphs.

An introductory paragraph prepares the reader for what is discussed in an essay. Lynn Quitman Troyka says: "An introduction sets the stage and provides a bridge from the reader's mind to the author's." (Troyka 1996: 104) In other words, the purpose of an introductory paragraph is to introduce the topic of the essay and it must be closely connected with its main part (the body of the essay). Otherwise the reader may become disoriented and may lose his or her interest in reading the essay further.

An efficient introductory paragraph in academic writing should include a statement which presents the writer's specific focus on the topic and the writer's intention for writing the given essay. This is the *statement of the thesis* of the essay, or the *claim*. In argumentation, which is the most frequent pattern in academic writing, "the central claim usually clarifies the main purpose for writing, and this claim will often begin the argument". (*Glencoe Writer's Choice* 2001: 289) Thus, identifying the claim at the beginning will help the student writer focus his/her argument. Journalists or other professional writers may not include a thesis statement in their introductions, as they are able to keep the line of thought. However, academic writing teachers should require their students to use a thesis statement. Student writers need to train their writing skills and demonstrate proper external essay organization. In academic writing a thesis statement is usually written in the last sentence or in two sentences at the end of the introductory paragraph. Next is an example of a thesis statement written in the last two sentences of the introductory paragraph (Essay title: *Commercialism Is Ruining the Holidays*).

Holidays should be special occasions that have religious, historical and cultural significance. Increasingly, however, holidays in the United States are turning into little more than business opportunities. *From coast to coast, the jingles and beeps of cash registers drown out the traditional sounds of holiday observance. The spirit of the holidays is being destroyed by commercialism.* (Troyka 1996: 164)

An introductory paragraph can be presented graphically in the following way.



## Introductory Paragraph

Thus, an introductory paragraph begins with a general statement about a topic, it presents commonly known information about the topic of the essay, and narrows the general information to the focus of the essay, i.e. to the thesis statement.

Not less important for an introductory paragraph is to trigger the reader's interest in the topic of the essay. In order to achieve this student writers are advised to use certain tips in writing their introductions. As a rule, these tips come before the thesis statement and should lead reasonably to it. Lynn Quitman Troyka suggests using a series of devices while writing introductory paragraphs. So, one of the most common tips to try is *providing relevant background information* about the subject of the essay. The introduction may contain *pertinent statistics and numbers* concerning the topic. *Using an appropriate quotation, asking a provocative question, or making an analogy* are also good devices to try in introductory paragraphs. Also, a powerful tip to use in writing an introduction is *relating a brief, captivating story or anecdote*. (Troyka 1996: 105)

Another technique often used by writers in introductions is *a definition or an extended definition*. The same subject may be defined in different ways. Some readers may not have any exact interpretation of the problem discussed. That is why, as indicated by Sheridan Blau, "a clear statement of what is at stake in the issue, as the writer sees it, is a crucial first step toward bringing readers over to the writer's view." (Blau 1992: 213)

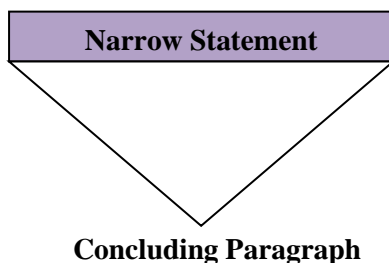
However, it must be noted that the effect of the introductory technique consists in the fact of how suitably it is connected with the thesis statement and with the support in the developmental paragraphs of the essay. An introductory device should be incorporated into the paragraph and not used for its own sake.

At the same time, a student writer should consider some strategies to be avoided when writing introductory paragraphs. Lynn Q. Troyka recommends students *to avoid obvious statements that refer to what the essay is about or what it will accomplish*, such as "I am going to discuss the cause of ..." and *overused expressions*, such as "As I recently discovered" or "Love is grand" etc. (Troyka 1996: 105)

Another problem to be avoided in writing introductions, says Joy M. Reid, is *making apologies, complaints, or presenting personal dilemmas*, for example, “Even though I don’t know very much about the topic, I decided to write what I can.” (Reid 1988: 58)

Contrary to the introductory paragraph, a concluding paragraph is intended to bring the discussed ideas to an end that result orderly from the thesis and its development. An ending that flows smoothly from the content of the essay strengthens the ideas and enhances the whole essay. A conclusion that is just tagged onto an essay doesn’t give the reader a feeling of summing-up and it blurs the essay.

Therefore, to write an effective and clear concluding paragraph, student writers should first regard the thesis statement and make sure the conclusion is totally integrated into the essay. The structure of the concluding paragraph is opposite from the structure of the introductory paragraph. Graphically a concluding paragraph can be represented in the following way.



Joy M. Reid advises student writers to start the conclusion with a *narrow statement* that connects the concluding paragraph with the last body paragraph. Then the conclusion should be enlarged towards the end bringing the essay to a final stage. While developing the conclusion students may use *controlling ideas* from the body paragraphs, but they shouldn’t reproduce the topic sentences. The concluding paragraph may also include a *prediction* connected with the content of the essay, a *solution* to a problem stated in the essay, or a *recommendation*. Generalizing Joy M. Reid states: “The conclusion borrows from everything that has gone before, summarizing without repeating exactly, suggesting, predicting. In so doing, it gives the essay its final shape, and gives writers a single last chance to show that their theses are valid.” (Reid 1988: 60) Still, if the essay is short,

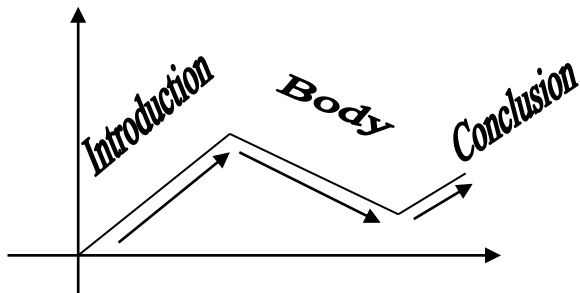
it is enough only to refer to the main ideas reflected in the body paragraphs. In longer essays summaries must be larger.

At the same time, there are some strategies to be avoided in writing concluding paragraphs. Thus, as Lynn Quitman Troyka suggests it is not a strong point to introduce a *new idea* in the conclusion, as it needs to be developed. If the student intends to include this idea in the conclusion it must be included in the essay alongside with other controlling ideas. (Troyka 1996: 108)

Another point to be avoided in conclusions is *rewording the introduction*. Generally, using any device appropriate for introductory paragraphs are suitable for concluding paragraphs as well, but student writers should avoid the same device in both the introduction and the conclusion.

*Announcing* what the student has done in the essay – “In this essay I have proved/explained that ...” – and *apologizing* – “Even though I am not an expert, I think my position is correct” or “I may not have convinced you, but ...” – are also wrong strategies to be used in concluding paragraphs. (Troyka 1996: 108)

Thus, student writers should choose those strategies and techniques in writing their introductory and concluding paragraphs that are most effective for a particular pattern of academic essay. The device used should keep the reader interested in the topic from the beginning to the end of the essay. Both the introduction and the conclusion should work like signal points within an essay’s framework, gripping the reader’s attention immediately and maintaining it to the essay’s final stage. This may be achieved if students make use of the most appropriate strategies and techniques for writing introductory and concluding paragraphs. The development of an essay, including the introduction and the conclusion, may be graphically represented as follows.



## Development of Essay

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