

Writing Introductions...

Word for word, your introduction is the most important part of your essay. As it is the first thing your examiner will read, the introductory paragraph should demonstrate several things:

- ✓ You understand the question and the complexities of its key words and/or phrases.
- ✓ You can clearly apply those terms to the subject matter of the essay (i.e. the chosen author, text, theory, timeframe, etc...)
- ✓ You can summarise your argument clearly and anticipate the main points of your answer.
- ✓ That your essay/argument is worth the read.

Here are some helpful ways to introduce the reader to your answer:

Definitions: Identify the key words in the question and define them. Use dictionaries and (peer-reviewed) encyclopaedias. This shows the examiner that you fully understand exactly what you are being asked to write about.

General Facts and Figures: By drawing upon a striking fact/quotation that addresses the question quite broadly, you can convincingly illustrate your 'take' on the answer. Use facts/quotations that link directly to the key words and phrases. Being imaginative and adventurous with an opening quotation/fact can grab your reader's attention. You should be sure, however, to keep it brief and relevant.

Signposting: Give your reader a concise summary of the major topics that will be covered in the body of your essay. Quite simply, devote one/two sentence(s) to each paragraph in your main answer. Mapping out your answer in this way will mark your intentions clearly from the outset – examiners don't like surprises.

Conclusive Statement: By finishing the introduction with a conclusive statement you can 'set up' your conclusion using rhetorical questions and anticipatory comments. This will make your essay read coherently by mirroring the beginning and end of your answer. This is important because your examiner wants to see that your answer demonstrates a coherent progression of ideas.

Finally, just because your introduction occurs at the beginning of your essay, don't feel that you need to complete it first. Redrafting it *after* the main body and conclusions are finished will help with the coherence and 'flow' of your answer.

...and Conclusions

Your conclusion is the last opportunity to impress your reader/examiner. It should tie together the most important aspects/complexities of your argument, demonstrating that, through your answer, you have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the question.

Here are some elements of an effective conclusion:

- ✓ Summarise – **do not repeat** – the important aspects of your answer/argument (these should have been anticipated in your introduction).
- ✓ Refer back to – **do not repeat** – the question and show that it has, and how it has, been answered.
- ✓ Resolve your argument into a conclusive 'ending'. This doesn't have to solve all (or any) of the complexities of your argument, but it should balance/evaluate the points that you have made.
- ✓ Gesture towards further work/research that could be undertaken to improve the specific academic field in question.

This basic mini-example demonstrates how your conclusion can mirror your introduction without the repetition of phrases or the introduction of new material:

Introduction	Conclusion
<p>Educational practice was irrevocably altered by the onset of print technology. The international spread of printed words greatly influenced the reading process and the spread of intellectual ideas on a global scale. Thus, the sedimentation of words kick-started a complex array of educational developments, transforming the relationship between writer, reader and text. These 'developments' can, however, be read and interpreted in a multitude of lights. Political control and manipulation of printed words has, as we shall see, both advanced and hindered the substance of learning in vastly different ways. Depending on the economic climate, political/religious stability and nationalistic investments in state education, printed words have been promoted and censored at illuminating intervals in world history. This essay will consider the impact of western teaching methods since the invention of the printing press, questioning X, Y, and Z.....</p>	<p>Clearly, the invention of the printing press marked a decisive shift in educational practices. By facilitating the mass production of texts, printing dramatically accelerated the spread of literacy in the west. Furthermore, by helping to solidify national vernaculars, the printing press transformed language interaction for millions of people, helping to solidify national tongues into their familiar 'modern' forms. However, such a revolutionary and complex technological advancement also brought about destructive cultural changes, prioritising those in control of the early presses. Such propagandist potential, to spread printed words on an unprecedented scale, arguably sidelined minority voices – and their languages – indefinitely. Interaction with these forgotten voices, and their oral contexts, in whatever mediums that they survive, would further question and unpack the modern reliance on technology as an educational tool.</p>

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