

# Introductions

As it is the first thing your examiner will read, the introductory paragraph should demonstrate several things:

- ✓ You understand the question, its background context, 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.

The introduction and conclusion should each be approximately 10% of your total word count

Introductions are often comprised of some combination of the following:

**Context:** Introduce your essay by outlining significant background or contextual information. This prepares the reader to fully understand the approach you take in answering the question.

**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.

**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.

**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.

Tip: 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.

# Conclusions

Your conclusion is the last opportunity to impress your reader/examiner. It should tie together the most important aspects and 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. For example, if you have any ideas or issues in relation to the **central issues** that you would like to mention, but that it was not possible or relevant to discuss in depth in the essay, and which still have or could have some relevance, you could include these.

**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>The student experience has been transformed due to the prevalence of social media, which can be defined as “websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (OED, 2012). Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have changed the way that students interact with each other and share information, and also how they spend their time. Thus, it has been suggested that interaction through such sites has replaced ‘traditional’ modes of meeting and sharing (Gallagher, 2011). This change has been read as having both positive and negative effects on the student experience. On one hand, social media creates vibrant online communities and allows students with similar interests to communicate (Donaghy, 2011). Yet, social media can also be understood as contributing to alienation within the student body and fostering anti-social behaviour, including bullying (McGrath, 2010). This essay will consider the impact of social media on the student experience at Queen’s University, Belfast by reflecting on the results of a student-wide survey and current research on the area. Major issues that emerged from the survey include X, Y, Z....</p>	<p>In conclusion, the popularity of various social media sites has caused a decisive change in the student experience. By facilitating communication between students online, such sites have altered how students interact with one another and these changes have been diversely interpreted as both positive and negative. This essay has argued that students at Queen’s widely use such networks and consider them to have an overwhelmingly positive impact on their student experience. Although certain disadvantages have been illustrated, the sense of identity, involvement, and participation that such social media networks foster and encourage has, overall, brought students closer together. A more nuanced understanding of social media’s impact could be achieved by surveying past students who studied at Queen’s who did not have access to such media and/or by comparing Queen’s online social network culture to those in other universities.</p>