

## Writing Strong Introductions and Conclusions

A good introduction motivates your readers, introduces your key themes, and states your main point, the solution to your problem...A good conclusion, on the other hand, serves a different end: as the last thing your reader reads, it should bring together your point, its significance, and its implications for thinking further about your problem.” -Joseph Williams’s *Style*

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### Effective Ways to Introduce

#### 1. Quotation

On his Oxford college application, world-renowned pastor Howard Benjean wrote: “At the end of the day, we all want love, acceptance, and to be debt-free.” Though Benjean died one of the most wealthy religious figures of the 20th century, he did not grow up with money. *He worked his way through college, as many college students must do today.* Each year, college tuition increases, forcing more students to take out loans and work to pay for their education. How do we solve this? This paper proposes that college tuition needs to be capped, the nation needs to get serious about debt forgiveness programs, and that interest rates on college loans should decrease.



#### 2. Anecdote

There was nothing particularly grand about the bus stop that day. There were several teenagers who looked like they were still asleep, a few business people, and one old man wearing a Vietnam War Veteran cap. The black eyepatch told me he was blind and the cane told me he had bad knees, a bad back, or both. I wondered silently if these were the consequences of the war. As the bus pulled up, the hurried passengers moved past him and boarded. He was slow to his feet anyway, and I caught sight of him tucking away an old photograph of woman. He straightened his cap, adjusted his eyepatch, and took a deep breath for the journey across the pavement to the bus. Teenagers had taken the handicapped seats and everyone else filled up the middle of the bus, forcing him to the back. *Was this what America promised him in return for his valiant fight? Did we only care for those able-bodied years of his life? All too often, veterans are not treated with the respect and gratitude they deserve.* The VA is making way in addressing this, but there’s more to be done, especially in terms of youth’s attitude toward veterans.



#### 3. Question

Is ASL a language? Can ASL be written? Do you have to be born deaf to understand ASL completely? *To answer these questions, one must first understand exactly what ASL is.* In this paper, I attempt to explain this as well as answer my own question about how to bridge the gap between the deaf community and hearing community.



#### 4. Strong opinion

Online lifestyle bloggers unfortunately do more damage than good when it comes to women's progression. Rather than encourage women that every voice has something to say (and blog about), bloggers suggest that looking fabulous is more important than sharing ideas. Some bloggers do share ideas, but do so while perfectly made-up and styled, suggesting that aesthetics are a prerequisite for spreading knowledge. The content, too, is a problem, as much of what's posted on a blog are fashion tips, how to blowdry hair, and what to wear when you travel cross country. *This fluff leaves readers like myself questioning where the real, deep content is. If beauty is more than skin-deep, shouldn't blogs aid us in determining what's below the surface?* The current lifestyle blog perpetuates the belief that a woman must be beautiful to be valued.



#### 5. Define a problem

Despite having access to convenient forms of voting, like absentee ballots, America is still witnessing lower numbers of unregistered voters than desired. This issue has been going on for quite some time, in fact. Some would even suggest the problem dates back to the time of the baby boomers. *To effect change, it is not enough to simply identify the reason for low polling numbers; rather, we need to identify solutions to raise the numbers.* Surprisingly, many Americans blame inadequate transportation for why they avoid voting. To raise polling numbers, communities need to provide free transportation on polling days on a wider scale than usual.



#### 6. Make a surprising statement

In elementary school, most students do not need to devote time or energy to explaining the difference between atheism and devil worship. *However, for Toni Benrad's protagonist, Hannah, elementary school was indeed filled with navigating the tumultuous waters of staying true to her family's strict atheist ways or accepting her best friend's more appealing Christian values.* Ultimately, this dichotomy Benrad sets up is a lens her young adult readership can apply to issues beyond religion--homosexuality/heterosexuality in particular.



#### 7. Combine several methods (quotation, anecdote, & question)

It is easy to joke about not "chasing anything but drinks and dreams," but for one small town football star and president of the scholars club, the joke was on him. When Mitchell Chance, of Austin, TX toasted to his football team's upcoming championship game with a full bottle of vodka, he had no idea it would be his last inspirational speech. Unfortunately, Mitchell wasn't the only college student in America this year to die from binge drinking. Twenty-nine other colleges reported student fatalities of the like. It's valid to say that drinking has been part of American college life since the first college opened, but there's no doubt the number of binge drinking deaths have increased. *The question now becomes, what do we--as students and classmates--do ensure safe drinking habits? More specifically, what role can on-campus clubs play in discouraging binge drinking? A large role, in fact.* Colleges that implement on-campus safe drinking clubs might not only notice a decrease in binge drinking fatalities, but may also positively change students' perceptions of peer pressure and drinking.

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### *Tips for Introducing*

1. Motivate readers to care
    - a. Help them see the issue and what needs to be done about it
    - b. Use pathos: "this must be done, otherwise..." "tragically, this may not be the end of the problem," etc.
  2. Address a seeming truth
    - a. X is widely accepted. Is it right or wrong to believe so? What are the implications?
  3. Consider "So what?" in hypothetical, exploratory way
    - a. If x continues, what will happen?
  4. Write out of order:
    - a. Write working thesis first, then body paragraphs, then introduction
  5. Have someone point out missing contextual info
    - a. Ask what uninformed readers need to know about this topic in order to understand your point
  6. Tell the reader why you're interested in the topic
    - a. "The issue of shoreline erosion is fairly localized, specifically for students like me who live in Anne Arundel County. Without a drastic change..."
  7. Implement three parts
    - a. Move from broad info (hook) to transition to specific info (thesis)
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### *Effective Ways to Conclude*



1. Pose a question about the future

Given the potential dangers to their health and the fact that being large does little to make them effective players, why do athletes work so hard to get bigger? Perhaps they think that the statistics will not apply to them personally--that adding pounds will improve their individual performance. We see this quite frequently with football players, specifically lineman, who pack on pounds with unhealthy fats, leading to a high fat to muscle ratio. Football players are not the only ones to blame, as we have seen hockey players and rugby players do the same. *There has been no longitudinal study, so it is difficult to know what the future holds for these overweight players. After the sport ends, will they keep up their eating habits and continue to gain weight?* It seems that intervention, or at the very least, awareness, might make a difference in maintaining the health of the players we all root for on Sundays.



2. Speculate about the future

Without stricter laws and more severe punishments to combat poaching, elephants will continue to be killed. *And while recent social media movement, #KnotOnMyPlanet, popularized on World Elephant Day, inspired a step in the right direction, the truth is that elephants are still in danger of poaching and extinction.* Enforcing laws with more severe punishments will discourage poaching, potentially save thousands of elephants, and keep the African plain the way it should be.



### 3. Add a relevant quote

For many, the name on the store really *is* all that matters. This is especially true of today's youth who, as we saw above in the experiment in which a Walmart shirt was embroidered with a Hollister logo, tend to become obsessed and even fanatical over the holy trinity of preteen brands: Hollister, Abercrombie & Fitch, and American Eagle. *What does this obsessive behavior mean for brands?* As researchers like Jib Fowles and Naomi Paluski would posit, it means advertising is working, but to stay in that happy, obsessive place, a brand must continue to break through to the consumer on an emotional level. After all, as Mark Tyler, author of numerous marketing books, would attest, "Isn't that the point of shopping--to fall in love?"



### 4. Follow up the introduction's anecdote

The old veteran finally made his way to the back of the bus and, with an exhausted "oomph," sat down. I tried to imagine what he saw in Vietnam, the heartbreak he experienced, and the catastrophes he witnessed. *He, like thousands of elders across the nation, fought to protect and better America.* I believe it is time we give back, starting with encouraging young people to volunteer at retirement communities and increasing the presence of the VA in the media. Even small acts of kindness, like offering a tired veteran your seat at the front of the bus, can make a difference.



### 5. Speak to essay title

HGTV: The White People's Network

Diversity may be everywhere--from our schools to our churches--but it hasn't quite made its way to the popular lifestyle network HGTV. *While there is the occasional ethnic couple featured, shows like Flip or Flop, House Hunters, and even Ellen's Design Challenge entertain hosts and guests that are mostly caucasian.* The problem here, as I argued above, is that in avoiding color and other forms of diversity in its guests and hosts, HGTV is also avoiding a broader audience. Welcoming people of color, ages, and sexual orientations in its guests and hosts would mean a greater diversity of viewers. The way I see it, if HGTV doesn't open its network to diversity, it will live and die as the white people's network.



### 6. Combine several methods

(anecdote, speak to essay's title, & add quote)

*Flip or Flop* caucasian hosts Tarek and Christina El Moussa gracefully welcome potential new, white homebuyers, into the Orange County midcentury modern home they recently renovated for a quick sale. The El Moussas and the potential homebuyers make small talk and casually promise to contact one another, but viewers are left wondering where the non-white homebuyers and hosts are. Diversity may be everywhere--from our schools to our churches--but it hasn't quite made its way to the popular lifestyle network HGTV. *While there is the occasional ethnic couple featured, shows like Flip or Flop, House Hunters, and even Ellen's Design Challenge entertain hosts and guests that are mostly caucasian.* The problem here, as I argued above, is that in avoiding color and other forms of diversity in its guests and hosts, HGTV is also avoiding a broader audience. Welcoming people of color, ages, and sexual orientations in its

guests and hosts would mean a greater diversity of viewers. The way I see it, if HGTV doesn't open its network to diversity, it will live and die as the white people's network. A problem best characterized by Turner Brown, multicultural speaker: "Advertising, the media, all of it, needs to recognize that we moved from black and white television to color a long time ago. But we still need to see more color as it is."

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### *Tips for Writing Conclusions*

1. "So what?" is a positive, affirmative statement now
    - a. "So what?" in introduction: If x continues, what will happen?
    - b. "So what?" in conclusion: If x continues, y will occur. The implications are...
  2. Consider players involved in issue
    - a. The agent, or entity, acting out in the issue
    - b. The action, what the agent is doing
    - c. The goal, what the agent hopes to achieve
    - d. The result, what the agent actually achieves
  3. Ask friend why they think this issue matters
  4. "This is significant because..."
  5. Use qualifiers to suggest how your solution might effect change:
    - a. May, perhaps, etc.
  6. Keep in mind two goals
    - a. To remind of thesis and suggest why this issue matters
  7. Consider reverse structure of introduction:
    - a. Move from main point (reword your thesis), to the "so what?", to implications of the "so what?", and finally to an attention grabber that echoes introduction
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### *"Big Picture" Tips*

Remember the function of each:

- Introduction: strongly urge readers to keep reading; take strong stance on issue
- Conclusion: to effect change; effectively encourage readers to think differently



The introduction and conclusion should mirror one another

The back cover of the Penguin Classics version of *The Financier* rightfully calls its protagonist, Frank Cowperwood, a "fiercely ambitious businessman." Modeled after financial legend, Charles T. Yerkes, Cowperwood seeks ultimate satisfaction, ignoring those who oppose and using the weak to achieve his

desires. At the surface level, Cowperwood is seemingly just a shrewd businessman, but his “I satisfy myself” motto is built upon underlying ideologies of capitalism, the American Dream, and Nietzsche’s weak versus strong philosophy (Dreiser 134). Ultimately, Dreiser suggests a certain magnetism in Cowperwood’s personality, which even he, as the author, is drawn to. Coming to the end of the novel, and consequently, to the end of this essay, proves the same thing: readers may be repulsed by strong characters such as Cowperwood, yet they are undoubtedly attracted to him because of the effectiveness of his “I satisfy myself” attitude.

It would be too forward to assume Dreiser wishes for a world without morals, but he certainly tempts his audience with a character who obtains everything he desires. Cowperwood not only gets what he desires, but also never abandons his motto like he abandons his family and the other financiers: “I’m sorry for you, not for myself. I’ll come out of things all right, eventually. I’ll be rich” (Dreiser 230). Perhaps this is why we are so fascinated with him: he has confidence and the uncanny ability to achieve despite the odds. Nietzsche summarizes this point best when he says, “why could not precisely that man who produced the most disastrous effects be the pinnacle of the whole species of man: so high, so superior that everything would perish from envy of him?” (469). And Nietzsche is right: we hate Cowperwood for his ability to thrive despite his overman attitude, but we also esteem him for it.

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