

7

Composing Introductions, Conclusions, and Titles

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REFLECT

Write Before You Read Think about the last time you wanted someone to think, feel, or do something after a conversation. How did you start that conversation? Why did you choose to introduce the conversation that way? Imagine you have been asked to tell a fellow student — someone new to academic writing — everything you’ve learned about introductory paragraphs. Write a list, a letter, a diagram — whatever feels comfortable — to share your knowledge. If possible, work in what you know about conclusions as well.

7.1

Considering the Role of Introductions, Conclusions, and Titles

While it’s important to write from a thesis statement, which will likely appear at the end of your introduction, your introductory paragraph may not be the first paragraph you write. In fact, you might not write your opening paragraph until after you’ve completed the rest of your essay. However, since your introduction will be the first thing your readers encounter, it’s important not to rush through it on your way to the body of your essay. As you plan your approach, think about how you might capture your reader’s interest and make your reader want to keep reading.

Another important but often overlooked element of an academic essay is the conclusion. Even more than with introductions, some writers tend to rush through their final paragraph. Yet the concluding paragraph is the last one your audience reads before deciding what to think, feel, or do in response to your ideas, so taking some extra time and effort to compose a memorable (or inspiring!) ending often works to your benefit.

Finally, we’ll pay some attention to titles in this chapter. The title is a surprisingly powerful way to get your essay’s point across. Titles can guide the reader through the essay, and experienced readers, like your instructor, will be in the habit of keeping the title in mind throughout the essay, even if it’s only as a subdued melody playing over your words.

7.2

Writing Introductions

You will want to craft introductions that draw your reader into the essay and then provide a brief overview of how you will approach the essay topic before ending with your thesis statement.

Hook the Reader

You might have heard the expression, “Don’t bury the lead”; it’s what editors say to reporters when they fail to mention the most interesting and enticing part of the story right up front. While you won’t be writing a journalist’s lead in an academic essay, you are still responsible for capturing your reader’s interest right out of the gate. You do this, of course, with what you might know as a “hook,” the catchy beginning of your essay that hooks your reader the way a fisherman catches a fish.

Types of Openings

There are, of course, as many types of openings as you can imagine, but the following list and examples should help if you’re having trouble beginning your essay.

- **Tell a story.** In a short academic essay, an introductory story is more likely to be brief and anecdotal than richly descriptive. Nevertheless, adopting a few of the narrative strategies discussed in section 6.6 can be a good way of placing your readers in the middle of your topic, as in the following example:

“Grit?” my father yelled at me, his sunburned forehead bathed in sweat. “If you want to know what grit really means, then try growing up on a failing farm in Oklahoma in the 1960s.”

- **Set the scene.** Readers always want to know where they are when beginning a new piece of writing. While the bulk of your essay may focus on the analysis of one or more texts, there’s no reason why you can’t briefly immerse your readers in a vivid setting relevant to the rest of the essay, as in this potential opening for an essay on growth mindset:

When Kashawn Campbell looked around his South Los Angeles neighborhood, all he saw was crumbling sidewalks, iron bars on the windows, and young men—hopeless and angry—loitering on street corners.

- **Include a persuasive quotation from an expert.** One of the invention activities mentioned in Chapter 4 is curating quotations (p. 90). While the focus in Part I is on quoting from your assigned readings, you may

come across a quotation by an expert that fits in well with your introduction, as in the following example:

Iowa State University psychologist Marcus Credé argues, “Grit as a predictor of performance and success and as a focus of interventions holds much intuitive appeal, but grit as it is currently measured does not appear to be particularly predictive of success and performance and also does not appear to be all that different [from] conscientiousness” (35).

- **Provide a specific date connected to a notable fact or event.** Anchoring the opening of your essay in a specific time and place not only gives you credibility—this writer has got the *facts*—it also gives your reader some idea of the general context for your essay. And readers want context, especially when they are deciding whether to commit themselves to an essay. Imagine this opening sentence in an essay focusing on growth mindset:

In February 2006, Carol Dweck published a book that would change the way many people evaluate human potential for growth.

- **Write a short declarative sentence.** Often, students are tempted to write a long, complicated opening with the goal of encompassing everything they have to say in a single sentence. Frequently those sentences get tangled up before they make their point. Rather than trying to cram everything into one long sentence, consider the impact you can make with just a few well-chosen words. Consider, for instance, the opening of two of the articles you’ve read in this book. David Leonhardt’s “Is College Worth It?” begins like this:

Some newly minted college graduates struggle to find work.

And Kurt Streeter starts his profile on Kashawn Campbell like this:

School had always been his safe harbor.

We know that both of these essays will go on to address complex subjects, but these authors start short not because they can’t write more complex sentences—they can—but because brevity provides their openings with a sharp *snap* that engages a reader’s interest.

- **Use an analogy.** An analogy is a comparison between two different things. An essay on growth mindset, for instance, might begin this way:

Just as a car without fuel will not move forward, so a person without growth mindset cannot succeed.

- **Present an uncomfortable truth.** We don’t always like to hear the truth, especially if it goes against our own views on a topic; however, confronting your readers head-on with a troubling fact or observation may make

them want to hear what you have to say in defense of your argument. How, for instance, would you respond to the following claim in an essay on grit?

No one wants to say it, yet the reality is staring us all in the face: grit alone is not enough to guarantee a person's success.

- **Present an eye-opening fact or statistic.** If you were writing on grit, and you wanted to demonstrate the extreme improbability that every single person who is poor lacks grit, you might begin with a statistic showing just how many people are impoverished:

According to the Center for Poverty Research at the University of California, Davis, in 2019, nearly eleven percent of the United States population, or thirty-four million people, lived in poverty.

- **Introduce a claim that you intend to disprove.** Suppose you began an essay on growth mindset like this:

To hear some educators talk, no student without growth mindset has ever been successful.

Readers might initially think that you agree with the claim, which would make a move in a different direction unexpected and interesting:

However, there are a number of factors besides growth mindset that one should consider.

- **Make an interesting list.** Lists provide easily scannable information—they give a quick overview of a topic that allows you to feel like you know what's ahead. An opening list on grit might look like this:

Seventh-grade math students in Chicago Public Schools, West Point Military cadets, National Spelling Bee champions—the one thing these very different people all have in common is grit.

- **Ask an intriguing question.** Asking a genuinely interesting question—as opposed to one that is dull or obvious—is a time-tested way to open an essay. A piece on growth mindset might start this way:

Have you ever wondered what all successful people have in common?

- **Amuse your reader.** Humor doesn't work in all situations, of course, so be sure that your instructor appreciates a good chuckle and that this move is appropriate for the assignment.

What do you get when you cross grit with grits? Why, a Southern-fried success story, of course.

- **Write from an image.** You can get your reader's attention without even writing a word by inserting an arresting image between your title and your first paragraph. To see how journalists are using images in the space between the headline and first sentence, click on Google News and read through several stories. You can learn more about reading and writing about visuals in 14.2 and 14.3.

One tactic you emphatically *don't* want to take is providing the dictionary definition of a word or phrase. If a definition can be found in the dictionary, then assume that your instructor already knows it or is capable of looking it up.

If one of these strategies doesn't seem to be working on its own, consider combining several different approaches. While the focus here has been only on the very first sentence, there's no reason why you can't think of your opening as a cluster of related sentences. Your ultimate goal is drawing your reader into your essay. The strategies described earlier have worked in other essays, but they are by no means the only possibilities. Indeed, your opening is one of the best places in an essay to give your creativity and imagination free reign.

DIY 7.2a Write an Engaging Opening Sentence (or Sentences)

Using the models in section 7.2 for inspiration, write two to three opening sentences for your current essay assignment. Your goal is to craft something that will immediately make your readers want to keep reading. Reflect on the benefits of each of your draft openings.

Move from Hook to Thesis

Assuming you've captured your reader's attention with a strong opening, what do you do next? The middle of the introductory paragraph can become kind of a dead zone for writers. After an exciting introduction, your essay can grind to a slow crawl if you squander the momentum that you've generated with your hook.

It doesn't have to be that way. Moving from your opening hook to your thesis statement normally takes only a couple of hundred words at most, but that space can be put to excellent use. Consider the following strategies for getting from your hook to your thesis.

- **Explain more fully a concept introduced in your hook.** Often your opening sentence won't fully make sense until you "unpack" it a bit. By the time readers get to your thesis, the relevance of your hook should be clear.
- **Finish telling the story that you began in your opening sentence.** Sometimes a compelling story takes three or four sentences to complete. If you have a good story to tell, go ahead and tell it, but don't

spend so much time that you forget the story's function as a bridge to your thesis.

- **Summarize key readings that you will return to later.** If your essay focuses on specific readings—or a film, work of art, podcast, or piece of music—very briefly summarize or describe those works so that they will be familiar to someone who is not familiar with them.
- **Introduce information that connects your hook with your thesis.** This could be a statistic that bolsters your argument or a quotation from an expert on your topic. The information should serve to make the thesis clearer and more persuasive.

The passage between your hook and your thesis may, of course, employ several of these strategies. As you draft the middle part of your introductory paragraph, keep these other tips in mind.

- **Make a clear connection between your hook and your thesis.** A catchy opening sentence is useless if it doesn't link clearly to your thesis and your essay overall. As you move beyond your opening sentences, be conscious that you are always writing *toward* your thesis statement.
- **Make sure each sentence connects with the next.** The sentences in this part of your introduction form a path from your opening to your thesis. Be certain that each new sentence connects logically with the one that precedes it.
- **Be concise.** Don't rush, but don't linger over the middle of your introduction, especially if you've written a strong opening. You don't want to lose momentum by getting tangled up in the minute details of your topic.
- **Revise your thesis as necessary *throughout* the composition process.** Until you turn in your final copy, your thesis is always a “working thesis” subject to change.

Sometimes it can be just as important to know what not to do as to do. As you're heading toward your thesis, keep two points in mind: First,

don't introduce irrelevant material. It's never a good time to go off on an unrewarding tangent in an academic essay; but wandering away from your main point is particularly noticeable in your introductory paragraph. Second, try not to “tread water.” Repeating the same idea over and over in slightly different guises strongly suggests that you don't have anything interesting to say about your topic.

DIY 7.2b Check Introductory Sentences Against Chapter Advice

Write a passage for your current essay assignment that takes readers from your opening sentence to your thesis statement, and then reread the “From Hook to Thesis” section of this chapter. Use the chapter advice to revise your opening paragraph.

End with Your Thesis

The placement of the thesis at the end of the introductory paragraph is common in academic writing in the United States and will be second nature to some students. However, you may resent the idea that your introduction must always end with your thesis statement, especially if you are passionate about pushing boundaries or feel that your audience or purpose calls for something else. Therefore, it's worth asking if your instructor is open to a thesis that appears in one of a variety of places throughout an essay. If you do choose an alternative placement, be certain of that flexibility before you turn in your essay.

Benefits of Conventional Thesis Placement

In a first-year class, ending your opening paragraph with your thesis serves three important functions:

- **It signals that you are aware of the conventions of academic writing.** Granted, there are disciplines, like creative writing and journalism, where innovative approaches to essay structure are rewarded. That may be the case in your class, too. But if it's not, or if you're unsure, it is better to err on the side of a more traditional approach.
- **It provides your reader with a clear roadmap of your essay.** It is also a smart way to ensure that you stay on track as you write.
- **It helps your instructor or a peer reviewer to quickly locate your essay's main points.** Knowing that a thesis will be found at the end of the opening paragraph allows busy readers to quickly identify and assess your argument before moving on to the other elements of your essay.

Thesis Check

Often when you are writing your introductory paragraph, you'll realize that the wording of your thesis needs some tweaking. That may be because the focus of your essay has changed during its composition, or it could simply be because you now see a way to make your thesis statement leaner, cleaner, and clearer.

While you will want to retain your focus on the material you've written about in the body of your essay, don't hesitate to revise your thesis so that it's more accurate, or simply because a few small changes would ensure that it flows more smoothly with the rest of the introduction.

Read a Sample Introductory Paragraph

As with body paragraphs, there is no single formula for introductory paragraphs. However, here's one possible way to introduce the essay

on mindsets we've been working on. The paragraph opens with a fairly short declarative sentence (a simple informative sentence) followed by an illustrative quotation. It then provides a brief overview of the topic that transitions to the thesis statement, which concludes the paragraph. Notice that the working thesis statement from **Chapter 6** has been slightly revised. A transition phrase has been added — “It seems clear, therefore, that” — and a now-unnecessary word — “that” after “suggest” — has been dropped. Last-minute adjustments of phrasing are common: Again, don't ever feel that just because you've written a sentence, it can't be changed.

Declarative sentence followed
by a persuasive quotation

Transition from hook to thesis

Thesis statement

Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck's ideas have a lot of people re-thinking their potential. In an article in *The Atlantic*, Christine Gross-Loh says that Dweck's “findings brought the concepts of ‘fixed’ and ‘growth’ mindset to the fore for educators and parents, inspiring the implementation of her ideas among teachers—and even companies—across the country.” Kashawn Campbell, the student profiled in Kurt Streeter's *LA Times* article “South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at Cal,” may never have heard of Carol Dweck, but he clearly has a growth mindset, as he is “ready to take the risks, confront the challenges, and keep working at them” (Dweck 58). Unlike Campbell, I was a failure in high school. Fortunately, the summer before my freshman year in college, I attended a program that has helped me develop a growth mindset. It seems clear, therefore, that college students' experiences suggest Dweck's theory about the relationship between growth mindset and success is valid. However, it is equally important to have an external support system for those times when our individual efforts aren't quite enough.

7.3

Writing Conclusions

If a strong introduction is like a good lead for a news story, a good conclusion is more like the final minutes of a job interview. You hope you've made a positive impression on your potential employer—that is, your reader—and you want to reinforce that impression by highlighting your strengths without simply repeating what you've already said.

As eager as you may be to finish your essay, resist the impulse to hurry through your final paragraph as quickly as possible. Instead, give your closing sentences as much thought as you

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End an essay on a strong, memorable note — the way you would a job interview.

gave your opening hook. It can help to take an extended break after writing the body of your essay. However, if you're on a deadline, even a snack break or a walk around the block can help reboot your imagination and energy.

While your conclusion is important, it doesn't have to do as much work as your introduction, so it's likely to be shorter. Think lean and strong. Stuffing your conclusion with irrelevant or redundant statements may pad your word count, but it will almost certainly make for a decreased impact on your reader—and may even lead to a lower grade.

Craft an Effective Conclusion

Many of the strategies that work for an opening hook can be used with equal success in a concluding paragraph. Of course, you may not want to use the same type of tactic in both your introduction and your conclusion, but reconsider these options when you're concluding your essay:

- **Tell a story.** Good storytelling nearly always makes us perk up and pay attention. Don't go overboard, but if a brief narrative dovetails with your overall message, use it to your advantage in your concluding paragraph.
- **Reset the scene.** Just as a vivid use of some or all of the five senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—nearly always draws readers in at the beginning of an essay, their use in a concluding paragraph can leave readers with an intense impression of the world you've been describing in your essay.
- **Include a persuasive quotation from an expert.** Quotations from authorities are often powerful, and a well-chosen quotation can cement your argument just as your reader is finishing your essay.
- **Provide a specific date connected to a notable fact or event.** Again, the actual date of an event often carries a lot of emotional weight. Think, for instance, of your response to the Fourth of July or September 11th or January 6th.
- **Use an analogy.** Metaphors and similes, which show surprising likenesses between apparently unlike things, can be as effective at the end of your essay as they are at the beginning.
- **Present an uncomfortable truth.** One of the main functions of academic essays is opening readers' eyes to difficult realities. However, if the evidence and analysis in your essay has been sufficiently persuasive, readers may no longer be able to ignore those uncomfortable truths.

While your conclusion is important, it doesn't have to do as much work as your introduction, so it's likely to be shorter. Think lean and strong.

- **Present a startling fact or statistic.** Because they can be proven objectively, well-chosen facts and statistics have persuasive power, wherever they appear in your essay.
- **Ask a provocative question.** Be sure that your question ties directly to the work that you have done in your paper. You *do* want your question to make people think, but you *don't* want it to be so open-ended that it makes readers feel as though they have learned nothing.
- **Amuse your reader.** Once again, humor doesn't work in all situations, but if your subject matter seems to demand a light touch at the end, there are far worse ways for readers to end an essay than with a smile on their faces.
- **Write from an image.** Sometimes you will find that a single image sums up everything you have been trying to say in your essay. Creating a “language picture” can be a very efficient way of helping to drive home your main points.

Here are two other time-tested strategies that are more relevant to conclusions than introductions.

- **Issue a reasonable call to action.** If you have convincingly made the case for your thesis, your reader may well want to know what, specifically, they can do next. The more specific and practical you are in your recommendations, the more likely your readers will look for ways to follow those suggestions. Don't ask your readers to change the world in one day, but do offer some modest suggestions that can help them along that journey.
- **Reconnect with your opening hook.** Returning to your opening hook is one of the most successful strategies for a conclusion in an essay. Doing so lets your reader know that your opening sentences were there for a reason, making the essay feel thorough and complete.

You want to be sure that your conclusion influences readers—and that it's clear what they should think, feel, or do in response to your essay.

Read a Sample Concluding Paragraph

It's important, yet again, to emphasize that there is no single correct strategy for composing a concluding paragraph. However, like the introductory paragraph, the conclusion serves as a kind of bookend for the essay. It sums up the main points, and may even expand on them somewhat, but its primary function is to bring the essay to a satisfying closure.

The following sample represents just one possible attempt to finish an essay using growth mindset to discuss the academic success of Kashawn Campbell and the essay writer. The paragraph opens with a quotation

from the reading by Carol Dweck and then applies that quote to Campbell and the essay author. The next sentence reintroduces the essay's second main point—that an external support system is also necessary for student success—and is followed by a quotation by academic experts indicating the importance of support in the classroom. Finally, the paragraph concludes with a sentence that succinctly sums up the argument of the entire essay.

Carol Dweck writes in her book *Mindset*, “The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it’s not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives” (56). Both Kashawn Campbell and I have benefited from having a growth mindset. We believe in ourselves, and we know that challenges and failures are really just opportunities to become smarter and better. Just as important, we have not been shy about asking for help. Unfortunately, not every student is quite so confident, which is why the authors of *Teaching Men of Color in the Community College* point out how essential it is for professors to create “conditions in the class where students feel welcome to ask questions, respond to questions, and inquire about their progress” (Wood et al. 25). Succeeding in college, and in life, isn’t always easy, but if we have a growth mindset and a supportive environment for our efforts, we all have the chance to become our best possible selves.

Quotation from an assigned reading

Quotation applied to essay subjects, Campbell and the student author

Further discussion

Additional quotation reinforces the writer’s thesis

Final summary and a note of hope

DIY 7.3a Write or Revise a Conclusion

You’ve now seen a number of possible options for writing a conclusion. If you are currently working on the draft of an essay, write, or rewrite, your own final paragraph using the ideas above. (If you aren’t working on anything at the moment, pull out an essay you’ve written in the recent past; try out one or two of the strategies from this chapter to revise the conclusion.) If your conclusion seems thin, consider combining several of the strategies listed in section 7.3.

Avoid Common Pitfalls

The suggestions above represent only some of the ways you might conclude your essay. Your main focus should be on making the conclusion feel *necessary*. A concluding paragraph with nothing new or significant to say is almost as bad as not having a conclusion at all, and even a good essay can be marred by a tedious ending. Here are a few final tips for what to avoid.

- **Don’t simply repeat what you’ve already said.** This is by far the most common error you can make in a concluding paragraph. A highly repetitive conclusion makes it seem as though your readers are incapable of

remembering what they read a few minutes ago, especially if your essay is just a few pages long. You want readers to feel as if they've been on a journey and have learned something.

- **Don't use a random quotation.** While a relevant quote from an expert on your topic is a compelling way to conclude an academic essay, don't settle for some arbitrary remark spat out by a quotation-generator. Also, avoid using a quotation for the final sentence. You want to leave your reader with *your* idea.
- **Don't conclude with "In Conclusion . . ."** It might seem natural to begin your final paragraph with the phrase "In conclusion . . ." However, just as readers assume you're talking about "today's society" unless you say otherwise, they will be able to see with their own eyes that this is your last paragraph.

DIY 7.3b Evaluate Your Conclusion

A good way to evaluate your conclusion is to look at it separately from the rest of your essay, as though it were its own paragraph. If you are currently working on an essay draft, print out your concluding paragraph or put it on its own page in a Google doc. (If you don't have an essay assignment right now, use the conclusion you wrote or revised for DIY 7.3a.) Write notes to answer the following review questions:

- Does the conclusion stand on its own as a good piece of writing? Point to specific examples in the paragraph supporting your evaluation.
- Does the conclusion employ one or more of the strategies suggested here in section 7.3? If so, which ones? If not, does it still engage your interest? If so, how does it accomplish this?
- Would the conclusion make someone want to read the essay? Explain why or why not.

7.4

Creating Titles That Work

While the title is the first thing that your reader will see, it is also often the very last thing many students think of before turning in their essays. Naturally, a great title paired with a lousy essay isn't going to earn you points with your readers (literally or figuratively speaking), but you'd be surprised how much readers value a good title. The very fact that you've taken the time to think it over and call your paper something other than "Essay #1"

or “Research Paper” suggests that you’re attending to every last detail of your essay, that you want to get it just right. If you’re writing something you plan to repurpose for or publish online—a blog post, perhaps—the right title can drive traffic to your ideas.

In her book *Stylish Academic Writing*, Helen Sword notes that “Among the many decisions faced by authors composing an academic title, the most basic choice is whether to *engage* the reader, *inform* the reader, or do both at once.” Ideally, of course, your title will do both, but if you must decide on one or the other, re-read the assignment for any indication of your instructor’s preference.

Write Engaging and Informative Titles

Using some recently published magazine articles as examples, let’s take a look at some effective ways to craft titles.

- **Allude to a crucial moment in the essay.** Referring to a specific moment in the essay, especially if it comes toward the end, has the virtue of adding suspense to your essay. Readers want to know what the title is all about, so they read until the answer is revealed. Erin Vachon’s “Rain on the Wind,” for instance, refers to the lyrics in a Kris Kristofferson song that her father-in-law sings on the other side of a thin wall while she experiences painful medical issues.
- **Ask a question.** The answer to the title of Maureen Dowd’s biting critical “Will Mark Zuckerberg ‘Like’ This Column?” is almost certainly no, and it can sometimes be effective to pose a question whose answer is obvious right from the start. More common, though, are titles with questions that don’t have easy answers: “Should We Abandon Our Smartphones?” or “Can the United States Bridge Its Political Divides?” In either case, the question posed in the title must be intriguing. Readers should want to know the answer, whatever it may be.
- **Employ a pun.** A pun is a joke exploiting the various meanings of a word, phrase, or fact. Punning in titles is especially popular in magazine writing, but you’ll want to check with your instructor to see if a pun is appropriate for the essay you’re writing for class. Among some recent examples of titles with clever puns are Ellen Ullman’s essay about women in software coding, “Gender Binary”; Barbara Ehrenrich’s piece about the premium placed on healthy good looks among older people, “Running to the Grave”; and Elizabeth Royte’s “Drinking Problems,” which is not about alcoholism, but instead about polluted groundwater.
- **Be as direct as possible.** It would be hard to get any more straightforward than Rick Moody’s “Seven Years of Identity Theft,” an essay on

exactly that topic. You see that same impulse to let readers know just what they're getting in Cheri Blauwet's "I Use a Wheelchair. And, Yes, I'm Your Doctor." These authors assume that the subject matter of their essays—the widespread danger of identity fraud and the notion that your doctor can be a brilliant practitioner and have a disability—is intrinsically interesting. Therefore, their titles state the content of the essays as precisely as possible.

- **Use a colon.** Many, if not most, titles in articles published in academic journals employ a colon in the middle of the title. Typically, the first part of the title provides the sort of catchy phrase we've just been talking about. On the right side of the colon, verbal playfulness is clarified by a more neutral and descriptive explanation of what the essay is actually about. We can see that dynamic at work in Katie Roiphe's "The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter Feminism Is Bad for Women." "The Other Whisper Network" piques our interest, and "How Twitter Feminism Is Bad for Women" provides us with the essay's focus.

The first title that pops in your head may be a good one, but more likely you will want to jot down several possibilities. Fiction writer Ernest Hemingway would draft dozens of titles for each book and then gradually discard those he didn't like. According to one critic, Hemingway would choose a title, in part, for its "potential impact on the browsing customer." You're likely not selling your work, but you are trying to convince a browsing reader to read on. *Listening* carefully to your title and *feeling* that it functions just as you want it to may be the best tests of whether or not you've got it right. Don't rule out "market testing" possible titles with peers or with a writing center tutor.

Once you have decided on your title, follow these rules for formatting it:

Basic Rules for Titles

- Titles are centered.
- In a double-spaced essay, the title is just two spaces above the beginning of your essay. There should not be any extra space.
- All the main words in a title are capitalized, while minor words are in lowercase. In a title, a minor word like "a" or "the" following a colon is also capitalized (*Hello, Writer: An Academic Writing Guide*).
- Do not use quotation marks around your own essay title (although if you are referring to a shorter work by someone else, you put the title inside the quotation marks).

DIY 7.4a Generate Titles for Your Essay

Using the title-generating strategies suggested here, as well as your own creativity, to write as many titles for your essay-in-progress as you can. Then narrow your list down to two titles and reflect on which may be best for your purpose and audience — and why.

Chapter 7 Checklist

Introductions, Conclusions, and Titles

- ☐ Does your opening sentence (or sentences) immediately draw your reader into your essay?

Hello, Writer provides a number of specific suggestions for “hooking” your reader into your essay. Be sure to try several different strategies before settling on one.

- ☐ Have you made a clear and logical connection between your opening hook and your thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph?

Be concise and clear in your transition, making sure that each sentence logically follows the preceding one and that all move cohesively toward the argument outlined in your thesis.

- ☐ If your working thesis needs revision, have you modified it so that it is more effectively incorporated into your introductory paragraph?

While you will want to retain your focus on the material you’ve written about in the body of your essay, don’t be shy about changing the wording of the thesis to ensure the “flow” of the introduction.

- ☐ Does your concluding paragraph bring closure to your essay without simply repeating what’s already been said?

Again, this book contains multiple strategies for writing conclusions that avoid vague and boring redundancies. Remember that the conclusion forms one of the last impressions your instructor will have before grading your essay.

- ☐ Have you selected the best possible title for your essay?

Use the tips in *Hello, Writer* for generating titles that, to use Helen Sword’s phrase, “engage the reader, inform the reader, or do both at once.”

7.5

Making It Stick

How will you introduce, wrap up, and title the essays you write?

Working Together

7.5a Revising Introductions Form a group of four or five students and have everyone send their introduction to another person in the group.

On the bottom of the document, each person in the group should ask one specific question about the paragraph. If someone has already asked the question you were planning to ask, think of another one.

Be as specific as possible with your questions. Rather than asking, “What’s the point of your introduction?” ask something like, “What emotion do you want the reader to feel after reading the third sentence?”

When everyone has responded to all the introductions, read through the questions on your own introduction, make sure you can understand each one, and then try to answer them all.

7.5b Revising Conclusions Now try the same exercise with your conclusion (see 7.5a). Share your conclusion with your group, and make sure each person asks a question about each concluding paragraph. Again, if anyone has already asked the question you were planning to ask, think of another one. Finish by trying to answer the questions written on the back of your own concluding paragraph.

Applying What You Know

7.5c Favorite Sentences Browse a few online opinion pieces, paying particular attention to the opening and concluding paragraphs. Search online for “Sacramento Bee opinion” or “Miami Herald opinion” or “Chicago Tribune opinion” — or any other newspaper title plus the word “opinion.” Read carefully and choose one or two of your favorite sentences from the essays you read. Write brief notes on two of your favorite sentences. What appeals to you about the sentences?

7.5d “Quick-Searching” Your Introduction

Do some quick research on your topic to help bridge the opening sentences and your thesis statement. Remember that while you don’t want to go into great detail at this point, a specific example or two may be just what you need

to strengthen the middle of your paragraph. Remember to cite any ideas or language that you borrow for your introduction (see Chapter 18 for MLA, 19 for APA). (Note: If you uncover any research that doesn’t work for your introduction, but might be useful elsewhere in your essay, be sure to file it for easy retrieval later on.)

7.5e “Quick-Searching” Your Conclusion

Do some quick research to strengthen your concluding paragraph. When you find a specific fact or relevant example, incorporate it into your conclusion, citing any material that comes from another writer. Again, if you uncover any research that doesn’t work here, but might be useful elsewhere in your essay, be sure to hold on to it.

Invitations to Write

7.5f Writing Opening Sentences

Shorter: Take your favorite opening sentence from any essay you’ve ever written, and make it better. If it’s long-winded, cut it down. If it doesn’t have enough pizzazz, add some. In short, make what you thought was good even better.

Longer: Extend your opening so that it consists of two or three sentences rather than one. Your new sentences should (1) connect with the first sentence, and (2) move toward the argument you will be making in your thesis statement.

7.5g Writing Conclusions

Shorter: Write the last sentence of your essay, the one you think will have the most impact on readers as they finish your paper.

Longer: Back up a little and write the entire concluding paragraph so that it leads directly to your final sentence. Make sure each sentence in the paragraph follows logically from the one that precedes it.

7.5f Writing Titles

Shorter: Read through the titles of the Modern Library's list of the 100 Best Nonfiction Books ever written: modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-nonfiction/. If you had to choose one title from the Modern Library's list for the essay you are writing,

which one would it be? (Feel free to modify the title a bit to make it work better for your essay.) Write a short paragraph explaining why you chose the title that you did.

Longer: Now, look at the title you are actually using for your essay. Write a paragraph describing why this is the perfect title for your essay. If you begin your paragraph and realize that your title isn't so great after all, compose a different title and write a paragraph about your new, improved version.