

Opening and Closing Essays

Opening an Essay

A good opening paragraph usually satisfies
several requirements:

- It focuses readers' attention on your subject and arouses their curiosity about what you have to say.
 - It specifies what your topic is and implies your attitude.
 - Often it states your thesis sentence.
 - It is concise and sincere.
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Some strategies for opening paragraphs

- State the subject.
 - Use a quotation.
 - Relate an incident.
 - Ask a question.
 - State an opinion.
 - Make a historical comparison of contrast.
 - Create an image.
 - Describe a problem of dilemma.
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The most common introduction
forms a kind of funnel:

It starts with a statement or
question about the subject,

it clarifies or narrows
the subject in one or
more sentences,

and then, it asserts
the central idea
of the essay

We Canadians love our doughnut shops.

] Subject related to
reader's experience

From coast to coast, in country and city, you will find
Canadians gathering in doughnut shops. We gather
there not just to eat and drink but also to talk, to
discuss, to see and be seen. What the café is for
French public life, what the pub is to the English
neighbourhood, so the doughnut shop is to the
Canadian strip mall.

] Development
Of subject

] Thesis
sentence

—Terry Pelletier (Student), “Doughnut Dominion” (LBH 110)

Can your home or office computer make you sterile? Can it strike you blind or dumb? The answer is: probably not? Nevertheless, reports of side effects relating to computer use should be examined, especially in the area of birth defects, eye complaints, and postural difficulties. Although little conclusive evidence exists to establish a causal link between computer use and problems of this sort, the circumstantial evidence can be disturbing.

Subject related to
reader's experience

Clarification of subject:
bridge to thesis sentence

Thesis
sentence

—Thomas Hartman, "How Dangerous Is Your Computer" (LBH 110)

Opening paragraphs to **avoid**

- **Don't reach back too far** with vague generalities or truths: “throughout human history . . .” or “In today's world . . .” You may need a warm-up paragraph to start drafting, but your readers can do without it.
 - **Don't start with “The purpose of this essay is . . .,”** or “In this essay I will . . .” or any similar flat announcement of you intention or topic.
 - **Don't refer to the title of the essay in the first sentence:** “This is my favorite activity” or “This is a big problem.”
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- **Don't start with "According to Webster . . ."** or a similar phrase leading to a dictionary definition. A definition can be an effective springboard to an essay, but this kind of lead-in has become dull with overuse.
 - **Don't** apologize for your opinion or for inadequate knowledge with "I'm not sure if I'm right, but I think . . ."; "I don't know much about this, but . . ." or similar lines.
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Closing an Essay

Usually set off with its own paragraph, the conclusion may consist of a single sentence or a group of sentences.

It may take one or more of these approaches:

- Create an image.
 - Strike a note of hope or despair.
 - Use a quotation.
 - Give a symbolic or powerful fact or other detail.
 - Recommend a course of action.
 - Summarize the paper.
 - Echo the introduction
 - Restate the thesis in a fresh way.
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Thus, the little circle of fried dough draws us together: police and citizen, senior and student, anglophone and francophone. By day and by night, through summer's heat and winter's snow, the donut shop is there for us, our second home, our national refuge.



Summary

Conclusion

—Terry Pelletier (Student), “Doughnut Dominion” (LBH 111)

Until we get the answers, I think we had better keep on building power plants and growing food with the help of fertilizers and such insect-controlling chemicals as we now have. The risks are well known, thanks to the environmentalists. If we had not created a widespread public awareness of the ecological crisis, we wouldn't stand a chance. But such awareness by itself is not enough. Flaming manifestos and prophecies of doom are no longer much help, and a search for scapegoats can only make matters worse. The time for sensations and manifestos is about over. Now we need rigorous analysis, united effort and very hard work.

Summary

Conclusion:
Call for
action

—Peter F. Drucker, “How Best To Protect The Environment” (LBH 111)

Closing paragraphs to **avoid**

- **Don't simply restate your introduction**—statement of subject, thesis sentences, and all. Presumably the paragraphs in the body of your essay have contributed something to the opening statements, and it's that something you want to capture in your conclusion.
- **Don't start off in a new direction**, with a subject different from the one your essay has been about. If you arrive at a new idea, this may be a signal to start fresh with that idea as your thesis.

- **Don't conclude more than you reasonably can from the evidence you have presented.** If the essay is about your frustrating experience trying to clear a parking ticket, you cannot reasonably conclude that *all* local police forces are tied up in red tape.
 - **Don't apologize for your essay or otherwise cast doubt on it.** Don't say, "Even though I'm no expert," or "This may not be convincing, but I believe it's true," or anything similar. Rather to win readers' confidence, display confidence.
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