



CSU Learning Skills: *your link to success*

Academic writing

Introduction: Body: Conclusion

The process of putting together a coherent essay, short or long, is not a mystery, nor is it particularly complicated: you just have to build a good case for your conclusion and structure your whole essay around that aim.

– Warburton, 2006, *The basics of essay writing*, p. 7

Writing the introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to inform the reader about the purpose and direction of your essay. A good time to do the introduction is after you have done the first draft of the essay's body.

Introductions usually include the following information:

- orientate the reader to the general topic (giving a background context to the topic, combined with an interesting and informative beginning that is likely to grasp the reader's attention and provide an encouragement to read on).
- refer to the focus of the essay (so that the reader is better able to pinpoint more accurately what aspect of the general topic is under review or being discussed).
- state the purpose of the essay (repeating the task word(s) from the assignment question, and allows the reader to understand how you will be dealing with the topic).
- outline the stages of the discussion (a clear outline of what you will cover in the main section; the main ideas that will be presented, and in what order).
- state in general terms what is the view, claim, proposition or thesis of the essay (which is an indication of your position in relation to the issue raised in the assignment question).
- indicate any limitations that control the discussion (in terms of place, time, specialised aspect, etc, to further narrow the topic).

There are no set rules to the sequence or inclusion of all these stages. The basic principle is to begin with general information/statements and become more specific or focused during the introduction.

Sample question

Illness and healing have important cultural components. As a result health professionals need to have high level cross-cultural skills in order to operate effectively. Discuss

Sample introduction

Australia's health professionals meet a great challenge working in our growing multicultural society, where education and training may have not met their needs in order to operate effectively. The need for awareness that different cultures have individual concepts, beliefs and experiences regarding illness and health is essential so that optimal care can be given. Communication, education and training are of paramount importance so that patients needs can be met. Furthermore, resources and health education sensitive to cultural issues also require close scrutiny and efficient utilisation if they are to support health professionals when interacting with diverse cultural groups.

Comment

The writer begins with a general background statement and introduces the issue to be discussed. This is followed by outlines of the areas to be covered in the body. The writer's opinion is expressed in phrases such as... 'meet a great challenge' (main thesis)... 'is essential' ... 'of paramount importance' ... 'also require'.

Writing the body

The middle of an academic paper is where you present the evidence gathered from your research to support your interpretations and views of the issues.

The body of your essay will include these features:

- Structured argument and discussion
- One idea or main point to a paragraph
- A logical progression of ideas (as outlined in the introduction)
- Support given to statements, with evidence, quotes, examples, statistics, figures, diagrams
- Opinions must be informed...no broad generalisations and unsubstantiated discussions
- Headings and subheading to indicate main points
- Each paragraph will follow on, or be linked to the next paragraph through transition (ending) and introductory sentences; there must be structure and continuity in your discussions
- You will do more than simply retell what you have read, in piece-meal fashion; you will need to present an argument in which you demonstrate a capacity to apply and interpret information you have researched.

It is expected you will be able to absorb information, discriminate between views, evaluate problems connected with the topic content, and, most importantly, communicate views and problems in a logical and understandable way. It is very easy to believe that you are having exciting and innovative thoughts about a topic; it is infinitely more difficult to hammer those thoughts out in writing so that others can understand them!



The main part of your paper must be structured clearly. Each paragraph should make a point, and possibly sub-points, illustrating, and, possibly, qualifying the sub-point(s). Each paragraph should flow into the next; this means that ideally the end of a paragraph should prepare the reader for the point made in the next. The beginning of a paragraph (often referred to as the topic sentence) should make the point discussed in the paragraph clear; the reader does not want to wait until half-way through the paragraph to find out why you are saying what are saying. And all the sentences in a paragraph should address the same issue. If you find yourself introducing a new point, you probably need a new paragraph.

The points you make within each section of your paper should be logically connected. This means writing a plan before you start so that you can see at a glance where the structural problems lie. It might make sense to follow a chronological sequence, or to address the points raised in the title separately.

The major turning-points in your argument should be clearly sign-posted. Use formatting as well as textual cues to signpost this; for example, use sub-headings to signal a new topic or a major turning point, so that your reader is in no doubt regarding the point reached.

Some students tend to use very brief paragraphs. Be warned: a single sentence does not constitute a paragraph! If you find yourself writing in a series of brief paragraphs (of 1 or 2 sentences), this indicates that you are not developing your ideas or argument and are probably simply listing points rather than discussing and developing a coherent, analytical argument.



Clear thinking and writing must be supported with critical thinking in essay writing. Thinking critically is concerned with evaluating strengths, as much as weaknesses, and with interpretation as much as with evaluation. Critical analysis combines critical, in the sense of evaluating, with analysis, breaking down into parts. So a critical analysis of an issue or an argument would evaluate it by examining its parts and how they relate to each other.

In an essay, supporting detail is the material that backs up the argument of the paper. The body of the essay develops in depth the issues summarised in the introduction. This more substantial content can be regarded as evidence for the briefer statements in the introduction. A useful editing technique is to carefully compare introductions to the essay body to see to what extent the introduction states the case that is being made in the body, and to what extent the body supports what has been stated in the introduction.

Citations and referencing are always an important part of an essay's 'evidence', and can be in the nature of summaries, paraphrases or quotes. Many essays will also require quantitative or other data as evidence.

Writing a conclusion

Normally, a conclusion will be of one to two paragraphs, depending on the word length of your essay. The primary function of the conclusion is to summarise the main points in your essay, and to confirm the thesis stated in the introduction. The Introduction and Conclusion when read together should give a good overview of the essay's thesis/main argument, the main topic areas and the main points/claims. The difference between these two parts of a formal essay is that the introduction

needs to focus on the assignment question or *subject*, whereas the conclusion is to focus on the *argument*.

Most conclusions contain the following information:

- A drawing together of the main ideas of the essay, by giving a summary of the major points/arguments raised in the body
- Establishes what you consider to be the main points of your discussion
- A rephrased thesis, which gives you the option of stating your opinion, without actually saying 'I think...'
- An overall concluding statement without introducing any new material

Sample conclusion

In conclusion, awareness of cultural diversity and greater understanding of different concepts and values held by people other than those from western societies/cultures can only enhance optimal care. Working towards improved cross-cultural communication skills and improving higher education is necessary so as to better prepare health professionals for the challenges they will encounter in their daily interactions with their clients. Though it cannot be expected that health professionals become expert in the numerous multicultural concepts, perhaps the time taken to enhance their knowledge of one ethnic group/community can aid their awareness and sensitivity to other groups, thus ensuring and maintaining high standards of care and satisfaction for both client and caregiver.

COMMENT

The writer signals the end of the essay with a linking phrase 'in conclusion' and restates their thesis. The main claims raised in the body are briefly summarised.

The thesis is modified to balance the argument, which shows an understanding of how theory relates to practice/reality.

Based upon:

<http://www.macarthur.uws.EDU.AU/ssd/unilearning>