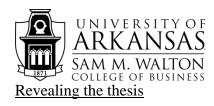# Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions

Effective introductions accomplish three things:

1. They capture the reader's attention.
2. They reveal the **thesis**, or central claim, of the paper.
3. They establish the **exigence**, or relevance, of the paper.

<u>Capturing attention</u>

Here are some common strategies for capturing the reader's attention:

- <u>Quotation</u>. An apt quotation can immediately give your readers a new perspective on your topic. Observe how the quotation from this paper on writer error creatively compares errors to the "enemy" in *The Art of War*:

  In The Art of War*, Sun Tzu writes, "Know the enemy" (81). If the enemy of writing tutors is writer error, then a tutor's best method for counteracting error is to better understand it: why it exists, where it comes from, what it says about a writer.*

- <u>Rhetorical question</u>. Rhetorical questions are effective because they make the readers pause and think about the answer. Notice how the rhetorical question works in this sample:

  What's in a name? The characters in Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest *learn the answer to that question the hard way.*

- <u>Provocative statement</u>. Beginning with a controversial or surprising statement is a good way to perk up readers, making them more attentive to your message. Think about how you would react if you encountered these as opening sentences:

  According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, more than half of all fatal single car crashes are caused by alcohol (5).
  If we continue to deny the threat of climate change, we are doomed to suffer its consequences.

- <u>Anecdote</u>. Another strategy for capturing attention is to begin with a brief anecdote, or story. However, you should be careful that the anecdote does not go on too long and distract the readers from your topic. Notice how the following sample uses this strategy:

  When Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook on February 4, 2004, he probably did not expect that his creation would eventually become the most popular social media site on the Internet. But today's entrepreneurs have much to learn from Zuckerberg and his marketing wisdom.

All academic papers should have a **thesis**, or a central claim, and an effective academic paper makes its thesis clear as early as in the introduction. Observe how the following sample introduction reveals its thesis:

A common myth holds that adults are incapable of achieving fluency in a second language. ***However, in some ways, adults are even more adept than children at learning second languages. Adults' greater patience and discipline affords them better study habits than the typical younger language learner, and their mastery of their native language lets them draw parallels between a familiar language and an unfamiliar one.*** *By dispelling this long-held myth, we invite additional resources for adults seeking an effective, long lasting language education.*

Establishing exigence

Finally, good introductions establish the **exigence** of the paper. Think of exigence as the paper's reason for being: what are you hoping to do with this paper? Why is this paper important, and why should your readers read it? Notice how the sample introduction establishes exigence:

A common myth holds that adults are incapable of achieving fluency in a second language. However, in some ways, adults are even more adept than children at learning second languages. Adults' greater patience and discipline affords them better study habits than the typical younger language learner, and their mastery of their native language lets them draw parallels between a familiar language and an unfamiliar one. ***By dispelling this long-held myth, we invite additional resources for adults seeking an effective, long lasting language education.***

Conclusions

Effective conclusions, like effective introductions, accomplish three things:

1. They restate the thesis.
2. They restate the exigence.
3. They leave readers with something to think about.

Restating the thesis

Remind your readers what you initially set out to prove. Use new, original language to restate your thesis in one or two sentences. Compare how the writer of our sample paper on adult language learning asserts the thesis in his conclusion to how he asserts it in his introduction above:

Although younger people may have a biological advantage when it comes to learning a language, adults compensate with stronger discipline, better study habits, and greater

linguistic experience. Recognizing these advantage is the first step toward securing adults more (and more effective) resources for language learning. But first, we need to recognize that,

contrary to popular belief, age does not prevent one from becoming fluent. As Mark Twain wrote, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."

Do not simply repeat your thesis. When you *repeat* something, you simply duplicate it word-for-word. But when you *restate* something, you put the same idea into new, fresh words.

<u>Restating the exigence</u>

Remind your readers why you wrote this paper—what are you hoping to do with the paper? Look at how the sample conclusion restates the exigence without simply repeating it verbatim:

Although younger people may have a biological advantage when it comes to learning a language, adults compensate with stronger discipline, better study habits, and greater linguistic experience. **Recognizing these advantage is the first step toward securing adults more (and more effective) resources for language learning.** *But first, we need to recognize that, contrary to popular belief, age does not prevent one from becoming fluent. As Mark Twain wrote, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."*

<u>Leaving readers with something to think about</u>

Finally, good conclusions do not just taper off; rather, they leave readers with something to think about or compel them to take some action. Here are some strategies for accomplishing this:

- <u>Quotation</u>. Just as a well-chosen quotation can hook your readers in, it can also leave your readers with a new way to think about your topic. Observe how a quotation effectively ends the sample conclusion:

Although younger people may have a biological advantage when it comes to learning a language, adults compensate with stronger discipline, better study habits, and greater linguistic experience. Recognizing these advantage is the first step toward securing adults more (and more effective) resources for language learning. But first, we need to recognize that, contrary to popular belief, age does not prevent one from becoming fluent. **As Mark Twain wrote, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."**

- <u>Speculation</u>. Look toward the future, as in this example:

Developments in language learning software will continue to help busy adults learn a new language on their own time. With increased funding, the companies that produce this software will be able to create even more effective learning tools.

- <u>Call for action</u>. If you are writing persuasively, you may wish to conclude by urging your readers to take action, as in this example:

If we continue to ignore this problem, it will only get worse. Therefore, it is in our best interest to elect representatives who will give it their full attention.

- <u>Call for further research</u>. One way to end your conclusion is to identify the things your paper *did not* cover and urge someone to "take up the reigns," as in this example:

While this paper has revealed some of the advantages adult language learners have over their younger counterparts, it has not discussed some of the challenges they face. Therefore, a future paper might consider the obstacles adults face when they study a new language.