

Roberts, John, John Scarry & Sandra Scarry.
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There is no one way to write an introduction. However, since many good introductions follow the same common patterns, you will find it helpful to look at a few examples of the more typical patterns to help you write your own introductions.

1. Begin with a general subject that can be narrowed down to the specific topic of your essay. Here is an introductory paragraph on astronomy, from *Universe* by W.J. Kaufmann:

Speculation about the nature of the universe is one of the most characteristic human endeavours. The study of the stars transcends all boundaries of culture, geography, and politics. The modern science of astronomy carries an ancient tradition of observation and speculation, using the newest tools of technology and mathematics.

Then comes the specific topic of this paragraph:

In the most literal sense, astronomy is a universal subject — its subject is indeed the universe.

2. Begin with specifics (a brief anecdote, a specific example or fact) that will broaden into the more general topic of your essay. Here is the introduction to Miriam Waddington's "The Hallowe'en Party," an essay about a family of Russian Jews settling on a prairie farm just outside of Winnipeg:

The year that I was twelve my father came home one day and announced that he had bought a farm. My sister Helen and I could hardly wait to see the farm which, according to my father, consisted of 26 acres in St. Vital, just beyond the outskirts of Winnipeg. There were 20 acres of bush with buildings, and six acres of meadow beside the river. My father had dreamed of such a farm all the years he was shut up in the dark greasy machine shop where he earned his living.

What follows is the topic of the story, a topic that is larger than the idea of merely buying a farm:

Now as I look back, I can understand my father's deep hunger for land.

3. Give a definition of the concept that will be discussed. Here is the introduction to "Man, Woman and Child," by Lydia Bailey, an essay about the rising trend toward single motherhood:

They are a new breed of mother — single, self-sufficient, and in their thirties. They have opted for motherhood without marriage. Some call it a return to tribal times when women raised children on their own with the help of other women. Others see it as a dangerous trend, labelling them as "the most narcissistic group of people you will ever see." Regardless of how it's perceived, statistics show that in the past few years the number of single mothers in their thirties has increased dramatically.

4. **Make a startling statement.** Here is an example from Arthur C. Clarke's "We'll Never Conquer Space":

Man will never conquer space. Such a statement may sound ludicrous, now that our rockets are already 100 million miles beyond the moon and the first human travellers are preparing to leave the atmosphere. Yet it expresses a truth which our forefathers knew, one we have forgotten — and our descendants must learn again, in heartbreak and loneliness.

5. **Start with an idea or statement that is a widely held point of view.** Then surprise the reader by stating that this idea is false or that you hold a different point of view. Here is an example from "A Planet for the Taking," by David Suzuki:

Canadians live under the remarkable illusion that we are a technologically advanced people. Everything around us denies that assumption. We are, in many ways, a Third World country, selling our natural resources in exchange for the high technology of the industrialized world. Try going through your home and looking at the country of origin of your clothes, electrical appliances, books, car. The rare technological product that does have Canada stamped on it is usually from a branch plant of a multinational company centred in another country.

6. **Start with a familiar quotation or a quotation by a famous person,** as Frank Trippett does in this example from "Getting Dizzy by the Numbers":

"The very hairs of your head," says Matthew 10:30, "are all numbered." There is little reason to doubt it. Increasingly, everything tends to get numbered one way or another, everything that can be counted, measured, averaged, estimated or quantified. Intelligence is gauged by a quotient, the humidity by a ratio, pollen by its count, and the trends of birth, death, marriage and divorce by rates. In this epoch of runaway demographics, society is as often described and analyzed with statistics as with words. Politics seems more and more a game played with percentages turned up by pollsters, and economics a learned babble of ciphers and indexes that few people can translate and apparently nobody can control. Modern civilization, in sum, has begun to resemble an interminable arithmetic class in which, as Carl Sandburg put it, "numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head."

7. **Give a number of descriptive images that will lead to the thesis of your essay:**

The nuclear family is breaking up. Both parents are working and children are left on their own for long periods of time, or are sent to daycare centres. Youngsters are learning about life from television and from movies, although the life that they learn about is often far removed from the truth. The incidence of crime is increasing among children because they receive little guidance and even less teaching on the difference between right and wrong. Social, moral, and religious values are declining.

Then comes the thesis of the paragraph:

These are among the reasons why the fabric of society is decaying.

8. Ask a question that you intend to answer. Many essays you read in magazines and newspapers use a question in the introductory paragraph to make the reader curious about the author's viewpoint. Some writing instructors prefer that students do not use this method. Check with your instructor before using this method. Here is an example of such an introduction, from "The Fatal Question," by Vivian Rakoff:

Human beings sustained in a state of technical "life" through complex machinery present to society and medicine a terribly and increasingly familiar dilemma. All the meaning and pleasure of ordinary life are absent and there's no hope of return to a dignified existence. Who has the authority to decide that the time has come to stop the machines?

9. Use classification to indicate how your topic fits into the larger class to which it belongs, or how your topic can be divided into categories that you are going to discuss. Here is how Robert Fulford began "How the West Was Lost," an essay on the destruction of Métis and Native societies in the West:

They may never have seen each other's faces, but the two most famous non-whites in late nineteenth-century Canada — Louis Riel and Big Bear — were linked by history and by the events of the crisis year 1885. They were dissimilar in many ways — Riel a Montreal-educated Métis who travelled widely and was three times elected to the Canadian parliament, Big Bear a Plains Cree, who knew no world beyond the Prairies. But they were also alike: both were mystics and prophets and both were charismatic leaders of peoples doomed by the westward thrust of the Canadian empire.

What Not to Say in Your Introduction

1. Avoid telling your reader that you are beginning your essay:

In this essay I will discuss ...

I will talk about ...

I am going to prove ...

2. Don't apologize:

Although I am not an expert ...

In my humble opinion ...

3. Do not refer to later parts of your essay:

By the end of this essay, you will agree ...

In the next paragraph, you will see ...

4. Don't use trite expressions. Since they have been so overused, they will lack interest. Using such expressions shows that you have not taken the time to use your own words to express your ideas. Some examples of trite expressions are

busy as a bee
 you can't tell a book by its cover
 haste makes waste

Using Transitions to Move the Reader from One Idea to the Next

Successful essays help the reader understand the logic of the writer's thinking by using transitional expressions when needed. Usually this occurs when the writer is moving from one point to the next. It can also occur whenever the idea is complicated. The writer may need to summarize the points covered thus far; the writer may need to emphasize a point already made; or the writer may want to repeat an important point. The transition may be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or even a paragraph.

Transitions are used to form links between paragraphs and the ideas in them in the same way that transitions are used to link ideas in a sentence or within a paragraph. Paragraphs are used to show a progression of ideas within an essay, a composition, or a research paper. Here are some of the transitional expressions you might use to help the reader make the right connections. Also refer to the chart on the inside back cover of this book and notice what other transitions could be used in the categories indicated below.

1. To make your points stand out clearly:

the first reason	second, secondly	finally
first of all	another example	most important
in the first place	even more important	all in all
	also, next	in conclusion
	then	to summarize

2. To present an example of what has just been said:

for example
 for instance

3. To present the consequence of what has just been said:

therefore
 as a result
 then

4. To make a contrasting point clear:

on the other hand
 but
 contrary to current thinking
 however

5. To admit a point:

of course
granted

6. To resume your argument after admitting a point:

nevertheless
even so
nonetheless
still

7. To call the reader's attention to your organization:

Before attempting to answer these questions, let me ...
In our discussion so far, we have seen that ...
At this point, it is necessary to ...
It is beyond the scope of this paper to ...

A more subtle way to link one idea to another in an essay is to repeat a word or phrase from the preceding sentence.

I have many memories of my childhood in the Yukon. These *memories* include the aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends I left behind when I moved to Ontario.

Sometimes instead of the actual word, a pronoun will take the place of the word.

Like many Northerners, I've had to learn to adapt to an urban way of life. *It* hasn't been easy, but today I almost think of myself as a Torontonians.

The following essay contains a number of transitions, both from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. They have been underlined.

Model Essay

The coldest temperature ever recorded in Canada was at Snag, Yukon Territory, on February 3, 1947. The thermometer fell to an amazing -63° C, colder than the average temperature on Mars. Moreover, this doesn't take into account the wind chill factor.

Weather this cold can do strange things to people. First of all, when people at Snag opened their mouths on that February day, their saliva froze solid. Then, because sound waves travel close to the ground in such weather, conversations from as far as 5 km away could be heard.

As a result of the cold, people at Snag could see their breath solidifying into ice crystals before their eyes. A spoken word remained in the air for three or four minutes as a motionless mist. Also, nose hairs froze and nostrils iced shut. People had to be careful not to breathe too deeply for fear of flash-freezing their lungs.

Because of this cold snap, a Canadian record for the coldest temperature, previously held by Fort Vermilion, Alberta, was broken. In fact, Snag's cold was the fourth coldest ever recorded in the world. That's cold!

Adapted from D. Phillips,
"How Cold Was It?", *The Old Farmer's Almanac 2001*

EXERCISE

Finding Transitional Devices

Below are the first three paragraphs of an essay on African art. Circle all the transitional devices or the repeating words that are used to link one sentence to another or one idea to the next. The first paragraph is done for you. Check your answers against those in the Answer Key on p. 422.

Like language and social organization, art is essential to human life. As embellishment and as creation of objects beyond the requirements of the most basic needs of living, (art) has accompanied man since prehistoric times. Because of its almost unfailing consistency as an element of many societies, (art) may be the response to some biological or psychological need. (Indeed,) it is one of the most constant forms of human behaviour.

However, use of the word *art* is not relevant when we describe African "art" because it is really a European term that at first grew out of Greek philosophy and was later reinforced by European culture. The use of other terms, such as *exotic art*, *primitive art*, *art sauvage*, and so on, to delineate differences is just as misleading. Most such terms are pejorative — implying that African art is on a lower cultural level. Levels of culture are irrelevant here, since African and European attitudes toward the creative act are so different. Since there is no term in our language to distinguish between the essential differences in thinking, it is best then to describe standards of African art.

African art attracts because of its powerful emotional content and its beautiful abstract form. Abstract treatment of form describes most often — with bare essentials of line, shape, texture, and pattern — intense energy and sublime spirituality. Hundreds of distinct cultures and languages and many types of people have created over 1000 different styles that defy classification. Each art and craft form has its own history and its own aesthetic content. But there are some common denominators (always with exceptions).

Ways to Write an Effective Concluding Paragraph

A concluding paragraph has one main purpose: to give the reader the sense of reaching a satisfying ending to the topic discussed. Students often feel they have nothing to say at the end. A look at how professional writers frequently end their essays can ease your anxiety about writing an effective conclusion. You have more than one possibility; here are some of the most frequently used patterns for ending an essay.

1. Come full circle; that is, return to the material in your introduction. Finish what you started there. Remind the reader of the thesis. Be sure to restate the main idea using different wording. Here is an example from the essay by Vivian Rakoff (page 254).

We are involved in an unending process of questioning and adaptation — an adaptation that, with luck, will not fall into a simple-minded rejection of the machine as the work of the devil. It is at least equally valid to see the manufacture of machines and goods as the continuous unfolding of human endowment in a cumulative history. Man the toolmaker is man expressing an ancient and important component of his true nature.

2. Summarize by repeating the main points. This example is from the preceding essay on African art.

In summary, African art explains the past, describes values and a way of life, helps man relate to supernatural forces, mediates his social relations, expresses emotions, and enhances man's present life as an embellishment denoting pride or status as well as providing entertainment such as with dance and music.

3. Show the significance of your thesis by making predictions, giving a warning, giving advice, offering a solution, suggesting an alternative, or telling the results. This example is from the essay by David Suzuki (page 253).

But Canadians do value the spiritual importance of nature and want to see it survive for future generations. We also believe in the power of science to sustain a high quality of life. And while the current understanding of science's power is, I believe, misplaced, in fact the leading edges of physics and ecology may provide the insights that can get us off the current track. We need a very profound perceptual shift and soon.

4. End with an anecdote that illustrates your thesis. This example is from Robert Fulford's essay on the Métis and Native people (page 254).

The criminal trials of the Indians and the Métis in the autumn of 1885 seem, in retrospect, outrageously illogical — the rebels were convicted of treason against an empire that had conscripted them as citizens without consulting them. But the North-West Rebellion also produced a trial that was merely bizarre. Shortly after the rebellion ended, an article in the *Toronto News* said that Montreal's Sixty-fifth Battalion had conducted itself during the hostilities in a way that was mutinous, reckless, disorderly, and drunken. Officers of the battalion sued, and eventually the editor of the *News* — a notorious enemy of French Canadians and the French language — was summoned to Montreal to stand trial for criminal libel. Convicted and fined \$200, he emerged from the courtroom, barely escaped with his life from a howling mob of outraged Montrealers, and went home to be treated to a torchlight parade of 4000 cheering supporters in Toronto. Two years later, fed up with the stresses

of daily newspaper work, the editor, Edmund E. Sheppard, founded a new periodical, *Saturday Night*.

What Not to Say in Your Conclusion

1. Do not introduce a new point.

I will tell you something else ...
Additional information has come to light ...
Let me leave you with a new idea ...

2. Do not apologize.

I'm sorry that I can't end on a more positive note ...
If I had more space ...
I can't be sure of every point ...

3. Do not end up in the air, leaving the reader feeling unsatisfied. This sometimes happens when the very last sentence is not strong enough.

Maybe the problem will never be solved ...
There is no obvious solution ...
We can only hope things will get better ...