

The major building block for essays and papers is the paragraph. However, just as there are various types of materials used in constructing a house, there are different types of paragraphs used in constructing a paper. The typical paragraph found in an essay is the main paragraph (these are discussed further in Write Right number three), but there are also three special types of paragraphs that are very essential to writing an effective essay. These are the **introductory**, **transitional**, and **concluding** paragraphs.

The **introductory** paragraph introduces the paper's thesis to the reader. This type of paragraph is used not only in presenting the topic and organization of the paper, but it is also utilized to grab the reader's attention. (**Phatic** is the fancy word for an attention-getting device.) It is probably best, when writing the introduction, to use the **funnel** or **general-to-specific** method. This method begins with a very broad, general topic (e.g. cars), and then gradually narrows the subject down to a specific example of that topic (e.g. Porsches). The point in the paragraph at which the thesis statement is finally made is most commonly in the last sentence.

There are also three other common techniques that are utilized to open the introductory paragraph:

1. **Factual Information:** The writer opens his or her paragraph by giving a list of facts that will eventually lead to his or her thesis (e.g. "Gasoline car sales have been plummeting...").
2. **Anecdote:** The writer opens the paragraph with a story that relates to the thesis (e.g. "I've always grown up admiring my father's collection of automobiles...").
3. **Quotation:** The writer builds the introductory paragraph around an applicable quote (e.g. "The president of Ford has said, 'Cars are now the wave of the future...'").

Here is an example of an introductory paragraph written with the funnel method:

The number of cars that are mass produced today is astounding. More than 200 million are produced every year throughout the world. The number of automobiles that are owned by people in America is equally staggering. Over 100 million Americans own at least one automobile and over twenty million families in America own at least two. Despite the amount of producing and selling of cars in this modern age, however, only one out of every twenty Americans knows the mechanics of his or her vehicle. This has led to America's naive dependency on the advice of costly automechanics. It is time for America to realize its problem and to begin learning about correct motorvehicle maintenance.

The **transitional** paragraph marks a transition in the paper from one section to another. It will indicate to the reader either that there will be a change in idea or topic, or else that there will be a movement from a broad topic to specific cases. These types of paragraphs, just like the funnel between the upper and bottom portions of an hour glass, are typically smaller than the other types. At times they can be as short as a single sentence or two. At other times, however, the transitional paragraph will need to be longer in order to sufficiently conclude the previous topic discussed and introduce the topic that is to follow. Here are two examples of the former type of transitional paragraph:

1. Now that we have taken a look at cars in general, let's move on to discuss the engines that make them move.
2. Here are some ways that a car owner can do his or her own auto check-up.

The **concluding** paragraph brings the paper to a proper closing, and not merely restates what has already been explained thoroughly in the essay. If the writer has sufficiently explained his or her thesis in the paper, then nothing more is needed. If, however, the writer cannot fit his or her concluding remarks about the topic in a final paragraph, then a conclusion is recommended. The conclusion will not repeat ideas, nor will it bring up a new topic; rather, it will give an implicit summary of the paper and then give a unique perspective on the material discussed, reemphasizing the thesis for the reader.

There are four main tactics that the writer can employ in writing the concluding paragraph:

1. **Restatement and Recommendation:** Here the major points of the paper are given in a summary form and a suggestion is made to the reader about the subject (e.g. Take good care of your car).
2. **Prediction:** The writer of a paper may want to predict what will happen with his or her topic in the future (e.g. The electric car will take over the industry).
3. **Allusion:** The writer may choose to write an appropriate story to get his point across to the reader. This will allow the reader to relate better to the subject (e.g. "I know a good friend who had a '57 Chevy...").
4. **Quotation:** This can give some more validity to your argument if it is a quotation from an expert in the subject (e.g. "As Lee Iacoca concluded at his retirement speech at Chrystler...").

Here is an example of a concluding paragraph with a restatement and a recommendation:

Americans have much more to learn about their automobiles than they think. It takes a good deal of research and advice from other people in order to get acquainted with the basics of a car. It also requires the car owner to confront his or her fears about fixing his vehicle and to take a risk in doing so. Finally, the car owner must be wise in choosing the right type of mechanic to work on his car when the problems become too large for the owner to handle. All of these steps are absolutely essential to follow if Americans ever want to get beyond their normal naivete about automobiles.

Here is an example of a concluding paragraph with a prediction:

The prevailing ignorance of basic automechanics on America's part is indeed appalling. However, in spite of the current situation, there is hope on the horizon. The number of people showing interest in car maintenance has been increasing at a steady rate over the past few years. Having grown tired and frustrated by the excessive amount of money they have had to spend on shops and automechanics, they have come to realize that car maintenance is much more essential than they had thought. If this trend continues in America, we can hopefully predict the coming of an age where dependence upon others for "car smarts" will finally become obsolete.

Take note, however, that there are no sure-fire formulas for writing the concluding paragraph. One approach might work better for one paper than for another. A recommendation for the writer is to draft three different paragraphs, utilizing the different techniques, and then choose the one that would be best suited for the paper.

Internet Resources:

The University of North Carolina Writing Center's web page gives several additional strategies for writing an effective introductions and conclusions, including several strategies to *avoid*. These overused strategies include "The Webster's Dictionary Introduction," "The 'America the Beautiful'/'I Am Woman'/'We Shall Overcome' Conclusion," and "The Grab Bag Conclusion." See the UNC Writing Center web pages for more.

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/introductions.htm>

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/conclusions.html>