

Unit 11: Introductory and conclusion paragraphs

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Objectives:

After studying this Unit, a student

- knows what an introductory paragraph and a conclusion paragraph are.
- knows how to write an introductory paragraph and a conclusion paragraph.
- can do the exercises effectively.

1. Definition of an introductory paragraph

The first paragraph of any composition is the introductory paragraph and is not less important than any other paragraph in the composition. It introduces the reader to the subject (topic) and what the writer is going to write about. It contains the main idea of the composition and prepares the reader for the paragraphs to come. Therefore, a good introductory paragraph should have the following characteristics:

1.1. It should introduce the subject (topic) immediately because this paragraph is the first thing that a reader sees. So it should inform the reader first of the subject being discussed in the composition.

1.2. It should indicate the plan of development: the way in which the subject is going to be developed. That is, a good introductory paragraph might indicate whether the composition is going to discuss causes, effects, reasons, comparisons and contrasts, and whether the composition is going to classify or divide a subject or explain a process.

1.3. It should arouse the reader's interest. That is, it should be interesting enough to arouse the reader to want to continue reading

1.4. The most important characteristic of the introductory paragraph is that it must contain the thesis sentence that states the main idea of the composition. This sentence serves as a plan for the whole composition. The method of development is also defined by this very important sentence. So it is a good

idea to state the thesis clearly in the introductory paragraph.

A question then arises about where the thesis sentence should be placed in the introductory paragraph. Whether it should be the first sentence or the last sentence of the introductory paragraph or whether it should be somewhere between the first and last sentences is a matter that the writer must decide for himself, depending on the nature of the thesis of the composition. If, for example, the thesis is a statement that might be controversial--such as, There are no prepositions in Thai--that statement should probably be the first sentence in the paragraph because it will immediately cause the reader to agree or disagree, or at least to be very interested. If, on the other hand, the thesis is not very thought-provoking--such as, Now I no longer dislike durian--the thesis sentence should probably be the last sentence in the introductory paragraph.

2. How to write an introductory paragraph

To achieve the characteristics mentioned above, the introductory paragraph may be written with the use of one of the following techniques.

2.1. A common technique of writing the introductory paragraph is to begin with the thesis sentence to arouse the reader's interest. Then this thesis sentence should be followed by a few support sentences to clarify the main idea and to define the method of development as in the paragraph below.

Topic: Writing Language Teaching Materials

Introductory paragraph: ¹ *Writing language teaching materials is a challenging experience.* ² *The writer must first consider the goals of the materials.* ³ *He must furthermore consider the background of the students* ⁴ *Then he must consider how to get from the student's background to the goals he has established.* ⁵ *The last, perhaps most important, challenge is to keep the students interested in learning. (1)*

In the introductory paragraph above, the writer begins with the thesis sentence, immediately introducing the topic "Writing language teaching materials" and then stating the main idea "is a challenging experience". The other sentences--sentences 2, 3, 4 and 5--are major support sentences that clarify the main idea and define the method of development. That is, this composition is going to analyze each of the points given in the major support sentences--the goals of the materials in sentence 2, the background of the students in sentence 3, how to get from the students' background to the goals in sentence 4 and how to keep the students interested in learning in sentence 5.

(1) From Leuschel, Donald A. et al, Advanced English I (EN 401), 5th ed., Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, 1986, p. 118.

2.2. The second possible technique is to begin your introductory paragraph with a general statement that shows the background of the topic, then gradually leads the reader to the thesis sentence at or near the end of the paragraph. However, not only should the opening sentence be general, it should also be relevant to the topic in some aspect. Again, study the following introductory paragraph, taken from the example composition on pages 206-208 in the preceding Unit.

Topic: The Organization of a Composition

Introductory paragraph: ¹ *A composition is a piece of short writing formed by a group of not less than three paragraphs that explain or prove one idea called "the main idea" to the reader in various aspects and purposes.* ² *The main idea is expressed in a sentence called the "thesis sentence".* ³ *This sentence gives the plan or direction for the whole composition and the composition must be expanded or developed according to that plan.* ⁴ *No matter what the thesis or plan of the particular composition is, all compositions consist of an introductory paragraph, support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph.*

In the above paragraph, the writer begins his introductory paragraph with a general statement about the topic, giving a definition to the word "composition" (which is an important part of the topic). Then he gradually leads the reader to the

thesis sentence with sentences 2 and 3 which support or expand the first sentence. Finally he sets the thesis sentence at the end of the paragraph (sentence 4). This sentence introduces the topic "all compositions" and states the main idea "consist of an introductory paragraph, support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph". The method of development of the whole composition is also determined by this sentence. That is, this composition is going to be developed by division, discussing each point stated in the thesis sentence with an introductory paragraph, support paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph.

2.3. A frequently used technique in introducing the reader to a subject is to begin the introductory paragraph with an appropriate quotation. The quotation to be used may be taken from speeches given by important persons or experts or a proverb that is relevant to the topic as in the introductory paragraph below based on the topic "How to be a good listener."

Topic: How to be a Good Listener.

Introductory paragraph: ¹"It is more difficult to be a good listener than a good speaker" an old saw says, showing the significance of being a good listener. ² A question then arises about what one has to do if he wants to be a good listener. ³ It is quite hard to find true answers to this question. ⁴ However, plausible answers to such a question involve the following three--though in fact, there may be more--practical steps.

In the above paragraph, the writer introduces the reader to the topic with the appropriate proverb "It is more difficult to be a good listener than a good speaker." Then he moves on with two related sentences--sentence 2 and 3--in order to lead the reader to come to the thesis in the last sentence. This thesis sentence states the main idea "involve the following three practical steps". The method of development is also defined by this main idea, that is, this composition is going to be developed by means of process analysis, explaining each of three practical steps for being a good listener.

2.4. Another helpful technique for writing an introductory paragraph is to open with a rhetorical question about the topic which you proceed to answer through the whole composition itself as in the introductory paragraph below.

Topic: Bangkok, a city of smiling people?

Introductory paragraph: ¹ *Are the people of Bangkok still smiling as they used to in the past?* ² *To find an appropriate answer to such a question, the serious problems that threaten people every day must be considered.* ³ *These serious and chronic problems are traffic congestion, a polluted environment and crime.*

The above paragraph opens with a rhetorical question to arouse the reader's interest. The writer does not directly answer the question; instead, he introduces the reader to the thesis

sentence--sentence 2--"the serious problems that threaten people everyday must be considered". Sentence 3 defines what the serious problems are. To find the answer, the whole composition is going to be developed in such a way that it gives reasons or discusses what makes people unable to smile any longer.

There are, of course, many other techniques for writing introductory paragraphs. However, the technique to be used depends on the nature of the topic, the thesis sentence, and the method in which a composition is developed. Keep also in mind that it is essential to avoid including sentences that annoy the reader. That is, do not indulge in apologies or complaints in your introductory paragraph such as "I am writing this composition because I am assigned to" or "I enrolled in this subject many times, but I could not pass it". Such a sentence is a weak opening sentence because it tells the reader that the writer has nothing to write about the topic.

3. Definition of a conclusion paragraph

Just as the introductory paragraph functions to open the composition by introducing the topic and the main idea to the reader, so the conclusion paragraph ends the composition with a closing statement, giving the reader a sense of logical completeness and finality. The conclusion paragraph is a signal pointing out that the writer has not simply stopped writing but has actually finished. What is put into the conclusion paragraph

depends entirely on what has been said in the composition. The conclusion paragraph, however, should have the following characteristics:

3.1. It should be brief, consisting of a single sentence or a group of two-five sentences.

3.2. It should summarize the main points discussed in the composition.

3.3. It should give a final statement showing that no more details are going to be discussed.

4. How to write a conclusion paragraph

Though there are many ways to achieve the characteristics defined above, the conclusion paragraph may be written with the use of one of the following techniques.

4.1. The most common technique for writing the conclusion paragraph is to restate the thesis (main idea) stated in the introductory paragraph. But be careful not to put the original thesis sentence into your conclusion paragraph. To avoid being repetitious, it is necessary to rewrite the thesis sentence using new words different from the original ones as in the following conclusion paragraph based on the second example introductory paragraph on the topic "The Organization of a Composition"

Conclusion paragraph:

¹ *These three kinds of paragraph are organized into the complete composition.* ² *Without them, the writing is not a composition at all.* ³ *Rather it is only a part of a composition which may not convey the writer's idea to the reader fully and effectively.*

In the above paragraph, instead of citing the complete original thesis sentence from the introductory paragraph, the writer writes it by using words different from the original ones (sentence 1) but the meaning is the same. Sentences 2 and 3 are support sentences emphasizing the significance of the thesis (main idea) of the composition.

4.2. Another helpful technique for writing the conclusion paragraph is to summarize or restate the main points discussed in support paragraphs. But this restatement or summary should be brief as in the conclusion paragraph below based on the introductory paragraph about the topic "How to be a Good Listener"

Conclusion paragraph:

Thus, it is true that listening to other's views with a democratic spirit, logically analyzing other's opinions and politely asking questions with good intentions are regarded as the most essential qualities for one who wants to be a good listener.

The conclusion paragraph above, even though it contains only one long sentence, summarizes the main points discussed in the support paragraphs completely.

4.3. The conclusion paragraph may be written in such a way that it answers a question posed in the introductory paragraph. The paragraph below based on the introductory paragraph about the topic "Bangkok, a city of smiling people?" fulfills such a function.

Conclusion paragraph:

The three reasons given above show that people in Bangkok today are unable to live with a smiling face which radiates happiness in their lives any longer. Rather, they will live a more and more serious life because of these three and other tremendous problems surrounding them.

The above conclusion paragraph provides an appropriate answer to the question "Are people of Bangkok still smiling as they used to in the past" raised in the introductory paragraph.

4.4. The final technique for writing the conclusion paragraph is for the conclusion paragraph to give recommendations or suggestions concerning the main points, or direct the reader's attention to possible consequences of what the writer has discussed in the support paragraphs. The paragraph below based on the introductory paragraph about the topic "Writing Language Teaching Materials" is a good example of this kind of conclusion paragraph.

Conclusion paragraph:

Writers of language teaching materials have met the challenges in a variety of ways. A few have tried to cater to the popular taste of the moment, being interested only in the profit they can reap. Others have tried to take all the various factors into consideration but have been hampered by a poor understanding of language, or language teaching, or of both. Still others, with a good understanding of language and language teaching have tried to write materials that help students learn no matter what the popular trend or the profits. (1)

In this conclusion paragraph, the writer suggests that the writers of language teaching materials are of three kinds: those who do not accept the challenges discussed, those that try to but are not successful because of outside influences, and those that accept the challenges in spite of everything. He furthermore implies that the third group is the best. Thus, this conclusion is a good example of a conclusion that makes suggestions for the future.

Like for the introduction paragraph, there are also many other different techniques for writing conclusion paragraphs, depending on the nature of topic, the thesis sentence, and the method of development. Keep in mind also that to end your composition reasonably, you should:

(1) Adapted from Leuschel, op.cit. p.119.

1. not present a new main idea in your conclusion paragraph.
2. avoid using expressions like "in conclusion" or "to summarize" because conclusion paragraphs are complete in themselves.
3. not make apologies for any opinions you have expressed, or even talk with the reader.

To sum up

1. The introductory paragraph should
 - 1.1 introduce the subject or topic.
 - 1.2 indicate the plan for development.
 - 1.3 arouse the reader's attention.
 - 1.4 contain the thesis statement.
2. There are many different ways to write the introductory paragraph, but the reasonable ways used depend on the nature of the topic, the thesis sentence, and the method of development.
3. The conclusion paragraph should
 - 3.1 be brief, consisting of one sentence or a group of two to five sentences.
 - 3.2 summarize the main points discussed in the composition.
 - 3.3 give a final statement showing that no more details are to be discussed.
4. There are many ways to write the conclusion paragraph, depending on the nature of the topic, the thesis sentence, and the method of development.

5. Exercises about writing introductory and conclusion paragraphs

Exercise 1.

Directions: Read the following four introductory paragraphs, then answer the questions that follow in the spaces provided.

1. What technique, according to the four techniques previously explained, is used by the writer to arouse your attention? (Write only a number.)
2. In which sentence is the main idea stated (Write only the number of the sentence.)
3. By what method is the composition going to be developed? (Indicate the method of paragraph development.)

Paragraph 1.

¹ As a matter of fact, there are many different religions in the world. ² They are classified into two categories--theistic and atheistic. ³ Among theistic religions Christianity is the most well-known, whereas Buddhism is the most well-known among atheistic religions. Though these two well-known religions have the same goals in teaching their faithful, they are remarkably different in their basic beliefs.

1. The technique used is _____.
2. The main idea is stated in sentence _____.
3. The composition is going to be developed by the method of _____.

Paragraph 2.

The act of reading involves at least three elements: Speed, understanding and evaluation. These three components of reading are of unequal importance. Although learning to read is a complicated process, it may be made simpler through an understanding of the elements that are involved. (1)

1. The technique used is _____.
2. The main idea is stated in sentence _____.
3. The composition is going to be developed by the method of _____.

Paragraph 3.

¹ *It is generally said that "Ramkhamhaeng University is a subject - market".* ² *That is true because it is open to all walks of life that meet required qualifications and want to search for knowledge.*

(1) Adapted from Leuschel, op.cit., p.117.

³ Ramkhamhaeng University students may thus be classified into two separate groups: those who attend class regularly and those who cannot attend class. ⁴ This classification reflects the nature of an open admissions university.

1. The technique used is _____.
2. The main idea is stated in sentence _____.
3. The composition is going to be developed by the method of _____.

Paragraph 4.

¹ What steps are involved in the process of writing a composition? ² To write a composition effectively, the following four writing steps are essentially involved. ³ The first step is choosing a suitable topic. ⁴ The second step is to write an introductory paragraph stating a reasonable thesis ⁵ The third step is developing the main idea of the composition support paragraphs to prove that thesis. ⁶ And the final step is writing an appropriate conclusion paragraph.

1. The technique used is _____.
2. The main idea is stated in sentence _____.
3. The composition is going to be developed by the method of _____.

Exercise 2.

Directions: Study the four introductory paragraphs above carefully, and then write a suitable conclusion paragraph for each of them in the spaces provided.

Conclusion for the first one:

Conclusion for the second one:

Conclusion for the third one:

Conclusion for the fourth one:

Exercise 3.

Directions: The following introductory paragraph, taken from the fourth example above, is accompanied by topic sentences and support details. Write appropriate support paragraphs based on this introductory paragraph, using the topic sentences and additional details given.

Introductory paragraph: *What steps are involved in the process of writing a composition? To write a composition effectively, the following four steps are essentially involved. The first step is choosing a suitable topic. The second step is writing an introductory paragraph stating a reasonable main idea for a composition. The third step is developing support paragraphs to prove that main idea. And the final step is writing an appropriate conclusion paragraph.*

- I. In writing a composition, the first thing to do is to choose a topic. (topic sentence 1)
 - A. Choose a topic you
 1. are interested in
 2. know some aspects about
 3. can find enough information for
 - B. After having chosen a topic,
 1. decide on major points
 2. list all major points in an outline.

II. Having chosen a topic and completed an outline, you should start writing an introductory paragraph (topic sentence 2)

- A. An introductory paragraph should
 - 1. be brief, introduce the topic
 - 2. arouse the reader's interest
 - 3. contain the thesis sentence
- B. The thesis sentence
 - 1. states the main idea
 - 2. defines the plan for the method of development.

III. The next step involved in writing a composition is developing support paragraphs. (topic sentence 3)

- A. Each support paragraph
 - 1. is related to the thesis sentence
 - 2. explains some point of the main idea
- B. Each support paragraph
 - 1. has its own topic sentence.
 - 2. each topic sentence is based on some aspect of the main idea in the thesis sentence

IV. The final step is to write a conclusion paragraph. (topic sentence 4)

- A. Conclusion paragraph
 - 1. ends a composition
 - 2. gives a sense of completeness and finality.

B. Conclusion paragraph

1. is brief
2. summarizes the main points
3. includes no new details to be discussed

Write your support paragraphs here.

Paragraph 1: _____

Paragraph 2: _____

Paragraph 3: _____

Paragraph 4: _____

Exercise 4.

Directions: The following three paragraphs are support paragraphs based on the topic "Present-day Bangkok". Read them carefully, and then write an appropriate introduction and conclusion for them in the spaces provided to make a complete composition.

Traffic congestion may be the first problem that makes Bangkok boring. The traffic in Bangkok nowadays is very congested not only during rush hours or at some places, but all the time and everywhere. This condition not only causes a waste of time, but also makes people upset when traveling somewhere, for even a short distance takes one or more hours.

The polluted environment is another reason for why Bangkok is not suitable to live in. In former times, Bangkokians lived without pollution at all. At present they are surrounded by all kinds of pollution: air, water, and noise pollution produced by different factors and from different sources, all of which can make people unhealthy.

The third reason concerns the crime problem which threatens Bangkokians every day and all the time. Bangkokians could travel anywhere safely and soundly in former times. Now they may be injured or robbed even on the bus or in the house. It seems that it is dangerous to live in Bangkok.
