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Please click here to view this recorded workshop:
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Today, during the first portion of the presentation, we will be discussing the importance of an introduction and ways to effectively write one in your academic paper.
Prior to that, though, what really is the purpose of introductions then? Well, some would say to open your paper. Others may say because it’s just how we naturally progress throughout language, dating back to times when storytelling trumped actual reading. Introductions, much in the same way as they sound, should truly introduce the audience to the subject matter and, believe it or not, make a point! Many students stray away from introductions because they feel that they are a waste of time or simply do not understand their purpose. I liken introductions, and papers as a whole, to Hollywood productions. When you first see the trailer for a movie, you are obviously attracted to the one that piques your interest while still leaving the ‘good stuff’ for the movie itself. How many times have we all observed movie trailers where the entirety of the plot appears before us prior to even making our way to the movie theatre? Far too often, if I may be so bold. This is purely due to not understanding introductions. So let’s dissect them a bit.

**Introductions? Two Important Reasons!**

1. This is the first exposure readers will have with the text. You must capture their attention!
2. Your introduction houses your thesis—the main point of your entire paper.
When thinking of the ‘introductory’ paragraph, I like to break this portion of the paper down into three respective parts: the hook, the supplemental information or additional information, and the thesis statement. Each of these will be covered throughout the duration of the presentation. Also, keep in mind the most important aspect of your introduction: it is the first exposure your audience will have with the text, so it’s best to make it worth their time! If you can relate to your audience, you will win your audience. That was told to me during my first year of college back in 2005 and, to date, no better bit of writing advice has ever been sent my way. Like it or not, introductions are your foundation, and, without one, your overall structure/paper will collapse.
Before diving into each of the three required portions of an introduction, I feel that some tips may make the process a bit easier!

First, try your best to start out with a broad, general statement that will appeal to a wide variety of readers. For instance, if you are speaking on the topic of bullying, you may well want to explore the more up-to-date cases of bullying to identify any newer trends, such as cyber bullying. From this point, you can then narrow your focus down to a detailed thesis statement and keep your readers on board! Current issues tend to gather much more attention, from my experience.

You can also employ the technique of beginning with a situation or idea that goes against your own thesis. Going off the last example with bullying, an appropriate start to the paragraph, in this fashion, would begin by looking at, for instance, communication between students in an academic setting. The connection here, especially to the topic of cyber bullying, almost writes itself!

After you grab their attention, hit them with the good stuff! Explain WHY your topic is so important. Make your readers care! A delicate balance between just enough information and an over-share is a delicate task, so be sure to be on point but descriptive.
Just as with the last tip, using an incident, story, or even an anecdote to help explore the topic to your readers may well assist in setting up your paper. This may be a more effective tactic depending on your subject matter.

Finally, these last two tips are my own personal tips from, well, my own personal collection! I always tell my students to avoid two tactics in their introduction: using quotes and facts. Why aren’t you using these in your paper? This is the best way to establish credibility later on in the paper. Your professor may allow this, and, if that’s the case, you will have to make this decision; however, be aware that using quotes and facts is viewed as a very big cliché in the academic world.
Some of you may well have been exposed to this at some point: The Funnel Method. Now, while this is not always absolute, it does possess a certain value for those in need. As you can see by the chart, it’s best to work from general, or broad, to specific. Each of the ‘portions’ of your introduction should follow the allotted number of sentences permitted, though, as you can see, the numbers vary depending on your subject matter. For this example, I chose to write a thesis statement on television usage. Let’s look at the example.

The way I came up with this thesis statement is rather simple—I thought of a question to ask the audience and then answered it. My original research question read as follows: What is one of the biggest contributing reasons to the expanding waistlines of American citizens? Television. Simply by answering the question, I immediately established a topic. From here, I blamed cable television and its programming. Let’s explore this in further detail.

**Thesis Statement:**
Because of the frequency of these shows set forth by popular television stations, more American citizens find themselves overweight due to a lack of inactivity, unhealthy from mounting periods of rest, and hopelessly addicted to cable television.
This thesis developed over time, of course, and for purposes of this presentation, we can’t spend too much time really picking apart the thesis. The thesis, however, is a very, very crucial component to the introduction as it essentially sets up what the rest of the paper will eventually say. Regardless of how you end up there, including a thesis is required. But, prior to getting a bit too specific, let’s start out a bit more general.
When you are creating your lead-in or hook sentence, be creative! I know that we are working in reverse order here, but this is the one portion of your paper where you can exercise some of your creativity freely. The general portion of the introduction typically includes a catchy sentence to grab the readers’ attention and get them reading the paper; it’s equally important to also remember that thinking outside of the box and trying multiple different approaches should yield some pretty exciting results. The most important thing to remember: your first idea is not always the best, and I do encourage you to explore other options! Test out some ideas on friends and fellow readers; sometimes if it catches your attention, it may bore others and vice versa! Just be certain you are gathering attention and getting your readers reading.
As an example, let's look at some trending topics in television right now to help with our lead-in sentence.

Popular Cable TV Shows:
The Walking Dead
Game of Thrones
Vampires
Crime scenes

The hook/lead-in sentence that I went with can be read on the screen. Take a couple of seconds and read through the example. What tactics do I use here to garner some interest?

When average American citizens click on their overly-priced and enormous television sets, they are often greeted by a host of the usual suspects: zombies, vampires, and petulant kings, oh my!
So what’s all this about additional information just prior to your thesis statement? Well, it’s the glue that holds the introduction together. After you hit the audience with the lead-in sentence, or the ‘general portion,’ ease into your topic slowly! By explaining your ideas a little more clearly, the audience will be at ease when the thesis statement arrives. Also, in conjunction with the last point, your audience will be in the ‘know’ by the time they read the purpose of the paper. Take a minute and read the example on the slide. Note how the language changes as the introduction approaches the thesis statement, but, most importantly, the audience is becoming more aware of the specifics that are to come—hence the funnel method.

Example:
The recent influx in cable television shows comes as no surprise; in fact, it would appear that viewers are tuning into these popular shows that, at some point or another, evolved from a movie idea in the past. Audiences, now more than ever, are tuning into hit shows featuring zombies, vampires, and even werewolves now at an alarming rate. So much so that the nation’s health has come under fire.
Here is the introduction in its entirety. Go ahead and read through this as a whole product.

Does this feel as if the audience has an idea of where the paper will go, while at the same time not giving away too much information? If so, your introduction is complete!

**General:**
When average American citizens click on their overly-priced and enormous television sets, they are often greeted by a host of the usual suspects: zombies, vampires, and petulant Kings, oh my!

**Supplemental/Additional Information:**
The recent influx in cable television shows comes as no surprise; in fact, it would appear that viewers are tuning into these popular shows that, at some point or another, evolved from a movie idea in the past. Audiences, now more than ever, are tuning into hit shows featuring the aforementioned creatures. So much so, in fact, that the nation’s health has come under fire.

**Thesis:**
Because of the frequency of these shows set forth by popular television stations, more American citizens find themselves overweight due to a lack of inactivity, unhealthy from mounting periods of rest, and hopelessly addicted to cable television.
stations, more American citizens find themselves overweight due to a lack of inactivity, unhealthy from mounting periods of rest, and hopelessly addicted to cable television.
When it comes to conclusions, the good news is this: if you master introductions, conclusions are not far off. What you’re afforded to do, however, includes discussing your personal feelings about the topic, making a prediction, recommendation, or warning, or you can simply link the conclusion back to the introduction! The choice is actually yours to make!

Looping back to the introduction always confuses students, and it need not do so! If you are able to wind down your paper, discuss the key points from your thesis statement, AND end on a high note, you did exactly what you were supposed to do.

Possible Conclusion Inclusions:
Briefly discuss how you personally feel about the topic.
Make a prediction or recommendation—or warning!
End on a high with a solid, useful quote.
Link your conclusion back to your introduction.
As a sample, take a look at this conclusion here; sure, it’s not in the prettiest of formats, but the picture is all the same. A conclusion, at the end of the day, must conclude. I know that sounds silly and rather straightforward, but many students set up the most brilliant of conclusions and simply fail to conclude the piece. We’ve all seen these movies, haven’t we? Some claim them to be the worst, I actually prefer them, but they have no place in academic writing. All academic papers must possess a purpose and a finalized conclusion so that a response and/or assessment can be received. To put it even simpler, and this one always gets people, think if we were to simply have a conversation and I stopped mid sentence and walked away. How would you feel? A bit shortchanged, correct? When you write an academic paper, you are creating a conversation with your audience. They know no better of what you intend to say, so do your best to lead them to a thoughtful conclusion, and that oftentimes means summarizing your ideas that you already stated previously, making a suggestion, or even posing a final question for your audience. In this particular example, I conclude the piece with a bit of thoughtful insight to keep my audience thinking.

To prove a simple point, if we were to just change this one up a slight bit, the tone changes completely and the conclusion reads as a call to action. For example:
To combat this problem, simply put, networks must take responsibility for their actions and the people, their paying customers, must see to it that they are aware of the impact they are having on us all.

Again, like introductions, conclusions are very subjective to the writer’s needs. You can make or break an assignment with an improper balance in both, so fully understanding exactly what you want to discuss in your paper remains key, hence the reason why we have dozens of workshops on these statements to help in that area, as well. Plus, we can help you get that sorted out in Live Tutoring, which is what I love to do more than anything during those sessions.
Conclusion Tips:

- Use what works best for your paper, not for yourself—Run some tests!
- If you are going to make a point, make it!
- Be mindful of your audience.
- Treat your conclusion equally as important!
- Ask yourself one question: Do I feel that I effectively summed up my ideas?

So, just as with the introduction, here are some quick tips to help you create a solid conclusion.

First, write what works best for your paper, not your ego! Test some conclusions out and have your friends read them. Which did they prefer the most?

Next, if you are going to make a point, make it! Don’t beat around the bush and leave the audience hanging on a cliff. Give them a sense of closure and contribute to your paper! This is, after all, a requirement of most, if not all, papers!

At the end of the day, it’s best to ask yourself one question: Do I feel that I effectively summed up my ideas? If you answer that question with a strong “Yes,” you are definitely on the right path!
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