Writing Exercise: Introductions and Conclusions

Before Writing an Introduction

An introduction is generally the first part of your paper a reader will encounter. Your goal with an introduction is to set up your paper, explain your argument, and catch your readers' interest.

- An introduction should (not necessarily in this order):
  - frame and define the scope of your essay (i.e., the text and author, the main ideas you'll explore, etc.)
  - show your method of approach to the topic (i.e., close reading, looking at diction, examining underlying meaning, etc.)
  - briefly provide necessary background information or context (i.e., where in the text you are focusing your attention, important character or plot details, etc.)
  - state the thesis the paper will develop (usually the last sentence or two of the introduction)
- Things to avoid:
  - Starting too broad and general to the point of losing all meaning: "Since the dawn of time. . ." "People have always traveled. Today, we use cars." "Words are very important in literature. . ."
  - Start going one way, then sudden zag and go another direction
  - Taking too long to get to the point—your reader wants to get to it
- Pro-tips:
  - You don't have to start writing your paper with the introduction—you can start anywhere!
  - The best way to start writing an intro is to just start writing. . . And then you come back and revise.
  - Write your first draft with a crummy intro just to get started, then take your rough conclusion and reshape that to be the new intro and revise the paper adding a new conclusion. Repeat.
  - Your introduction can be the last thing you write/revise!

Writing an Introduction

1. Write an interesting opening that draws your reader in but gets right to your specific topic.
   a. EX: *When the wife in Marie De France's lais* Bisclavret *confronts her husband about where he goes mysteriously for days at a time, it if probably safe to assume she did not expect him to confess to being a werewolf.*
2. Provide some brief background on your text and establish the issue/question you'll explore.
   a. EX: *This poem, composed in the 12th century, presents a strange tale that challenges readers to determine a clear message. . .*
3. Provide a definition of any terms or explanation of your methodology that might need to be made clear.
4. Write your thesis statement. This should be a statement of your claim and your reasons why it is the best solution/idea and should explain how you're supporting that solution (plan of development).
   a. EX: *Although on its surface* Bisclavret *appears to be about a wife's betrayal of her husband, the poem uses the werewolf as a metaphor for domestic violence to a highlight the tenuous position and danger posed to women. This is apparent when we examine the opening warning about werewolves, the diction of fear used to describe the wife's reactions, and the violence the wife suffers in the end.*

Before Writing a Conclusion

A conclusion is the moment where you bring everything in your paper together. In some ways your conclusion is pre-built because you're already assuming a specific outcome based on your thesis, so it is "easier" to write than an intro. On the other hand, you need to make sure you are not just saying what's already been said but bringing your thoughts to a culminating point and helping your reader look beyond your essay.

- A conclusion should do some or all of the following:
  - Restatement—Restates the thesis and the main arguments—not just repeating them, but bringing them all together and reminding the reader of your claim and supporting reasons.
  - Culmination—The conclusion is where everything should come together. It should not merely summarize; it should ascend to one final statement of your thinking
  - Send-Off/So What—The culmination should form the basis of the send-off. This point is where the writer can draw broader conclusions. Why does this matter? What have we learned?
- Things to avoid:
  - The mirror image (the most common problem):—the writer merely repeats the thesis and summarizes the main points or presents a reverse of the intro.
  - The unnecessary summary—only lengthy, complex papers need a conclusion that summarizes all of the material covered in the paper.
  - An unnecessary announcement—"And in conclusion, let me say…."
- Pro-tips:
  - As you make revisions to your argument and your supporting points, you'll need to adjust your conclusion to match (or vice versa).
  - Avoid introducing a new idea, claim, subtopic, or piece of evidence in your conclusion. The conclusion is where you tie all of your claims together; it is not the place to introduce new claims or evidence.

Writing a Conclusion

1. Write a sentence that communicates to your reader that you are bringing all of your points to a close. Perhaps this means returning to the anecdote or staggering statistic you opened with, but it should also be (or build to) a restatement of your thesis.
   a. Note: Try to avoid phrases like "In conclusion," "in summary," or "in closing."; your reader should be brought naturally to this point from your transitions and organization
2. Re-establish the issue/idea in the text that your paper examined
3. Write a statement (a sentence or two) of culmination. The conclusion is where everything should come together. It should not merely summarize what you've already said, but should bring everything together into one final statement of your thinking.
   a. Synthesize, don't summarize: don't simply repeat things that were in your paper, but show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.
4. Write a final statement (a few sentences) that provides a "send-off" for your reader that provides an answer to the question "So what?"
   a. Show your reader why this essay matters and how it helps our understanding about the text