

# Essay Writing

Unit 2B – How to Structure an Essay: Writing Introductions and Conclusions

**INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES**

Learning Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

*This unit's place in the whole module:*

Unit 1A How to be analytical:  
What is analysis?

Unit 1B How to be analytical:  
Setting up a taxonomy

Unit 2A How to structure an essay:  
Developing an essay structure

**Unit 2B How to structure an essay:  
Writing introductions and conclusions**

Unit 3A How to use evidence:  
Developing an argument out of the evidence

Unit 3B How to use evidence:  
Supporting your argument with the evidence

Unit 3C How to use evidence:  
Avoiding plagiarism

Unit 4A How to develop an argument:  
Being persuasive

Unit 4B How to develop an argument:  
Being critical

## UNIT 2B.      **How to structure an essay: Writing introductions and conclusions**

### OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

After you have finished this unit, we hope you will be able to:

- identify appropriate structural units which make up essay introductions and conclusions
- recognize the relationship between the main body of the essay and its introduction and conclusion

### IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEMS WITH WRITING INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

If you have been having difficulty in writing introductions and conclusions, your marker may have made a comment on your writing similar to these:

- *"It's difficult to understand the overall structure of your essay."*
- *"This essay doesn't have an introduction, so it's difficult to get into."*
- *"Your conclusion is weak because it doesn't seem to draw together the things you have written in the essay."*

### INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT

In the previous unit, you were looking at the overall structure of the essay. In this unit, you will be looking at how the introduction and the conclusion are related to the whole essay. Without a clear introduction, your reader will probably find it difficult to pick up what the essay is about. The introduction is critical to making sure that your reader is clear about the purpose of the essay; otherwise, their reading of your essay will probably be more hard work than enjoyable. Although the conclusion is not quite so critical, if you do not come to an ending which is appropriate for the essay, again your reader will not be happy.

### 1. ROLES OF THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION IN THE ESSAY

When we think of the way that an essay should develop and unfold its message, it is useful to capture this development by seeing the simple relationship between the beginning, the middle, and the end of the essay.

ESSAY STAGE	PURPOSE
<b>Introduction</b>	to tell the reader what the essay <b>is going to be</b> about
<b>Body</b>	to tell the reader what the essay <b>is</b> about
<b>Conclusion</b>	to tell the reader what the essay <b>has been</b> about

### 2. STRUCTURE OF THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction is a very important part of your essay because it is here that the reader expects to find out what the essay is about. Typically, the introduction to an analytical essay contains at least some (but not necessarily all) of these structural elements:

### **Possible stages in the introduction**

#### **ORIENTATE TO TOPIC**

To give a general background to the essay topic

#### **STATE PURPOSE**

To state the purpose of the essay

#### **STATE THESIS/STATE PROPOSITION**

To state the essay's main point  
either "that X is so" or "whether X is so"

#### **STATE OUTLINE**

To state what stages the essay will develop through

#### **STATE SCOPE**

To state what the limits of the essay will be

Clearly, these stages of an introduction cannot be written until you have planned your essay and you really know how you are going to structure it. A common problem for essay writers new to university studies is that they labour over the introduction long before they really know what they want to write. More experienced writers often leave their introduction till last.

### **Exercise 1**

Read the following introduction which has been divided up into its stages. Decide what is the function of each stage, using the possible stages of an introduction listed above. Why do you think there are only two stages?

*Increased knowledge about pre-natal development has recently provided a great deal of evidence to support the fact that "the mother's physical health and the psychological stresses experienced by the mother can influence the fetal environment and the development of the fetus."*

(STAGE \_\_\_\_\_)

*Throughout the essay it will be seen how such factors as nutrition, smoking, fatigue, exposure to radiation, alcoholic beverages, coffee, other drugs and diseases of various types, and maternal emotional state influence the fetal environment and the development of the fetus by affecting the mother's health in general. It may be relevant to mention that the mother's genetic make-up may also be influential on the development of the fetus. For example, the mother's age, size, blood type, chromosomal make-up and other factors may influence the development of the fetus as well.*

(STAGE \_\_\_\_\_)

### **Exercise 2**

This next introduction has not been divided up yet. Divide it up into its stages by drawing a mark at the beginning of each new stage. On the right hand side of the text, write the functional stage for each:

*Social inequality in the broadest sense is a common condition of all human societies, and represents one of the most sensitive areas of concern to social agencies and commentators. Inequality is a social fact. Its origins lie in the existence of norms, sanctions, and the distribution of power, and it is these which influence an individual's opportunities and abilities. This is a universal feature of all human societies. The purpose of this paper is, firstly, to elucidate the mechanism of the distribution of power which is one of the most important inequalities in all human societies, and, secondly, to explain how power tends to converge in the hands of a few. Emphasis will be placed especially on power structures and the elite.*

### **3. STRUCTURE OF THE CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of your essay serves the general purpose of telling the reader what the essay has just been about. More specifically, the conclusion to a persuasive analytical essay may contain the following elements:

#### **Possible stages of a conclusion**

##### **SUMMARISE OUTLINE**

To state what stages the essay developed through

##### **CONFIRM THESIS/STATE THESIS**

To restate the thesis of the essay, or to state the thesis of the proposition

##### **QUALIFY THESIS**

To identify special/important focus or focusses that the thesis refers to

### **Exercise 3**

Identify the stages of this conclusion and write in the functions that they are performing on the right hand side of the text:

*In all, it is possible to conclude that the physical health of the mother will greatly influence the development of the fetus. In the majority of cases, the factors influencing the mother's health such as smoking, malnutrition, drugs and diseases are closely related so that it becomes difficult for researchers to determine which factor and to what extent that factor is responsible for the adverse effects caused to the development of the fetus. However, a great deal of the research associated with pre-natal development does indicate that the main influences on the environment and development of the fetus are from controllable causes.*

#### **4. CONNECTING THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END**

Finally, it is interesting to see the relationship between the conclusion of an essay and all the stages that make up the essay. In order to see that relationship more clearly, we will first of all look at Prue's introduction to her essay about the effects of television violence on children. Then we will analyse the relationship between this introduction, the stages in the body of the essay, and the conclusion.

##### **Exercise 4**

Read Prue's introduction and label its stages. Does the introduction give us a good indication of what the essay will be about?

*As television has been labelled an "influential teacher" by many professionals, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" is definitely worth further investigation. If it is found that the quality and content of the children's programs promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations have no relevance. Unfortunately however many studies show that children's television is lacking and is even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of television violence on the development of the child's aggressive nature is one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of television on children.*

##### **Exercise 5**

Now read Prue's conclusion and label its stages. Is there a close relationship between the introduction and the conclusion? Underline the words and phrases that indicate this relationship.

*Although many controls and regulations have been introduced to enhance the quality of children's programs in Australia, violence and crime still seem to filter through. The common finding across most age groups is that this television violence and crime instigates aggressive behaviour. Therefore, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" is indeed cause for alarm. For the young pre-schooler, the child with a high base level of aggression, and the unsupervised "latch-key" child, the implications of television violence are quite serious.*

# ANSWER KEY

## ESSAY MODULE

### Unit 2B

#### How to structure an essay: Writing introductions and conclusions

#### Exercise 1

*Increased knowledge about pre-natal development has recently provided a great deal of evidence to support the fact that "the mother's physical health and the psychological stresses experienced by the mother can influence the fetal environment and the development of the fetus." (STAGE: ORIENTATE TO TOPIC)*

*Throughout the essay it will be seen how such factors as nutrition, smoking, fatigue, exposure to radiation, alcoholic beverages, coffee, other drugs and diseases of various types, and maternal emotional state influence the fetal environment and the development of the fetus by affecting the mother's health in general. It may be relevant to mention that the mother's genetic make-up may also be influential on the development of the fetus. For example, the mother's age, size, blood type, chromosomal make-up and other factors may influence the development of the fetus as well.*

(STAGE: STATE OUTLINE/STATE PROPOSITION)

#### Exercise 2

<i>Social inequality in the broadest sense is a common condition of all human societies, and represents one of the most sensitive areas of concern to social agencies and commentators.</i>	ORIENTATE TO TOPIC
<i>Inequality is a social fact. Its origins lie in the existence of norms, sanctions, and the distribution of power, and it is these which influence an individual's opportunities and abilities. This is a universal feature of all human societies.</i>	STATE THESIS
<i>The purpose of this paper is, firstly, to elucidate the mechanism of the distribution of power which is one of the most important inequalities in all human societies, and, secondly, to explain how power tends to converge in the hands of a few. Emphasis will be placed especially on power structures and the elite.</i>	STATE PURPOSE STATE OUTLINE

**Exercise 3**

<p><i>In all, it is possible to conclude that the physical health of the mother will greatly influence the development of the fetus. In the majority of cases, the factors influencing the mother's health such as smoking, malnutrition, drugs and diseases are closely related so that it becomes difficult for researchers to determine which factor and to what extent that factor is responsible for the adverse effects caused to the development of the fetus. However, a great deal of the research associated with pre-natal development does indicate that the main influences on the environment and development of the fetus are from controllable causes.</i></p>	<p>CONFIRM THESIS</p> <p>SUMMARISE OUTLINE</p> <p>QUALIFY THESIS</p> <p>CONFIRM THESIS</p>
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**Exercise 4**

<p><i>As television has been labelled an "influential teacher" by many professionals, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" is definitely worth further investigation. If it is found that the quality and content of the children's programs promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations have no relevance. Unfortunately however many studies show that children's television is lacking and is even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of television violence on the development of the child's aggressive nature is one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of television on children.</i></p>	<p>ORIENTATE TO TOPIC</p> <p>STATE PROPOSITION</p> <p>STATE PURPOSE</p> <p>STATE THESIS</p> <p>STATE SCOPE</p>
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**Exercise 5**

<p><i>Although many controls and regulations have been introduced to enhance the quality of children's programs in Australia, violence and crime still seem to filter through. The common finding across most age groups is that this television violence and crime instigates aggressive behaviour. Therefore, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" is indeed cause for alarm. For the young pre-schooler, the child with a high base level of aggression, and the unsupervised "latch-key" child, the implications of television violence are quite serious.</i></p>	<p>SUMMARISE OUTLINE</p> <p>CONFIRM THESIS</p> <p>QUALIFY THESIS</p>
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