

## Assignment Introductions and Conclusions

The initial essay writing plan suggested that you should leave the introduction (and conclusion) to the end.<sup>1</sup> You don't have to, and for many that feels odd, but even if you write it first you should always revise it at the end. This is because the introduction and conclusion hold the whole essay together and need to reflect what is going to happen (or what has happened) in the essay. Therefore it is only when the essay is finished that you can complete the introduction and conclusion.

### Introductions

**Introductions** are the place to explain what you understand the question to mean and how you are going to go about answering it. It thus orientates the reader to the structure of your essay and helps them see what you think the question is about. Sometimes you might understand the essay question differently from the marker. If you set out how you understand the question in your introduction, and as long as it's a valid understanding, then the marker should mark to your understanding, even if they comment that there was another meaning intended.



1. There are two dangers that beginning essay writers fall into with their introductions. Firstly they might use the introduction to give a lot of extraneous material. It can be tempting to think that you need to use the first page or two to let the marker know that you have understood the whole course and to give all sorts of definitions, background material and general explanations about the subject. Unfortunately, rather than showing what you know, this comes across as waffle and padding and suggests that you are avoiding answering the question. Remember that the marker is after whether you can use the knowledge you have gained, not whether you have memorised everything that was said. So your introduction needs to be short and sharp (say 50-250 words). By half way down the first page, you should be answering the question.
2. The other danger is to put your answer to the question in the introduction. That feels like you have already made up your mind what the answer is before you have started to explore the topic!

---

<sup>1</sup> Miles, S., 2013 Grand Opening Balloons Shows New Store Launch [online image] Available at <  
<http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/grand-opening-balloons-shows-new-store-launching-photo-p178679>> [Accessed 1 August 2013]

So instead your introduction should

- Start with an opening sentence or two that arouses interest or explains why the essay question is important or interesting.
- Explain how you understand the set question – paraphrase it in your own words
- Show you understand the problem or issue or reason that this question needs answering
- Briefly define any key terms
- Explain how you are going to answer the question, by identifying the issues you will explore and the order you will deal with them (i.e. give an overview of your structure)

### Example 1

In the essay writing document we created a structure for the following essay title:

*Discuss the portrayal of disciples and discipleship in one of the canonical gospels (80%).  
Reflect on whether and how this is 'good news' in your specific church context (20%)*

Introduction 100

Disciples - who they are and how they are portrayed 700

Discipleship - what it is and how it is portrayed 700

Summary of the portrayal of disciples and discipleship 250

Is this summary good or bad news for my church context? 400 (20%)

Conclusion 100

My introduction to this essay might look like this:

Being a disciple of Jesus has never been an easy option yet, as a church, we are called to make disciples. In this regard Mark's gospel has much to offer us as we seek to be Christ's disciples in the world. This essay will explore who are the disciples in this gospel and what sort of picture Mark paints of them. It will then turn to the subject of discipleship and see what Mark has to offer and whether it matches what we see in the actual disciples. Some conclusions about what discipleship is, in Mark's gospel, will be drawn and finally the essay will ask whether, and in what ways, this might be 'good news' or gospel for a particular rural congregation. [123 words]

Note how my first two sentences both set the scene and hopefully catch people's interest, while also indicating why the essay question needs answering. The final 3 sentences explain how I am going to answer the question and set out the structure I had planned earlier. At the same time I paraphrase the question in my own words showing how I understand it. The only thing I haven't done is explain any key terms because I have decided I will define disciple when I explore what that means in Mark's gospel.

I am then ready to launch into my first section. I don't need to explain why I have chosen Mark's gospel or even give any of the background about who Mark is, or when he wrote the gospel etc. because the question doesn't ask for that. Instead my next paragraph would begin something like: "Mark uses the term disciple in his gospel for various groups of people. Firstly there are..."

## Example 2

The second essay structure we created looked like this:

*Which of Bevans' Models of Contextual Theology seems to you to be most fruitful in relating Christianity to a context you have studied?*

Introduction 100

Bevans' Models of Contextual Theology - what they are 350

Best Model for my context - say three or four examples of how it is fruitful 1050

Why other models are less fruitful 600

Conclusion 100

It is often said that Christians are called to be in the world but not of it, but how should we relate to our context and find God in it? In 1992 Bevans produced five models with a sixth added in 2002. Different situations call for different models and we can find instances of all of these in the history of mission. I will start by briefly outlining the models and then apply them to my experience of a summer beach mission. I will explore which best explains how that beach mission related to its summer holiday context, and why it achieved the results it did. I will explore how elements of the other models were visible in the beach mission but were less fruitful as models. [127 words]

Can you see the various elements at work in this introduction?

### Optional Exercise 1

Take one of the essays coming up and create a structure for it (See how to write essays for guidance on creating a structure). Then try writing an introduction for an essay using the structure you proposed. If there is specific information you haven't got leave space for it... (e.g. Bevans produced ...(number)... models of contextual theology which many have found helpful.). The main aim is to turn your structure into an introduction.

## Conclusions

**Conclusions** clearly need to conclude the topic and summarise the answer you have found. The trap that many people fall into here is to introduce new material that they suddenly think might be relevant. The problem is that you have no space in the conclusion to justify and explain your new material and it will have nothing of the academic rigour of your earlier arguments. Your conclusion should say nothing that you have not argued in the body of your essay and should have no examples that you have not used earlier.



Instead your conclusion should

- Draw everything together
- Summarise the main themes and your general conclusions
- Give the answer to the question using the words of the question if possible
- Confirm why those conclusions are important or significant
- Sometimes (but certainly not always) it might state further questions or other related subjects that need further thought but are beyond your essay

It is harder to give a sample conclusion because it is so dependent on the actual content of your essay but here is an attempt, for our discipleship essay. Assume that I have actually explored everything I mention earlier in the essay! Note how I try to use the words of the essay question to show that I have an answer to it.

*Discuss the portrayal of disciples and discipleship in one of the canonical gospels (80%).  
Reflect on whether and how this is 'good news' in your specific church context (20%)*

In this essay we have seen that Mark's disciples did not find being a disciple easy. Mark portrays the disciples as a group of confused followers who are continually misunderstanding what Jesus is calling them to and who Jesus is. Despite this, Mark portrays discipleship as a high calling but one that will lead us to take up our cross – the way of suffering and death. At first sight this was not 'good news' for my own congregation of comfortable middle class rural Christians! However, in the end, the puzzling contradiction between the reality of the disciples and the teaching on discipleship turned out to be good news for us. Even though we, like the disciples, find the task of discipleship difficult and often fail, we, like the original disciples, are still named as disciples by Jesus. [137 words]

## Further Study

You might find it helpful to look at the document on structuring an essay.