



Move Conclusion To Introduction

Writing clearly leads to thinking: students' first draft introductions are often weak, and their conclusions are generally clearer and more purposeful. But what should they do when the concluding paragraph includes the most articulate statement of their ideas?

Some prewriting techniques can help students begin their writing with direction and a sense of argument, but no amount of prewriting can prevent students' ideas from continuing to develop – nor would we want it to! But we do want final drafts to reflect the strongest, most developed ideas students are capable of producing.

How It Works

When a concluding paragraph is the strongest paragraph of the essay, particularly in its statement of purpose or central argument, simply move that paragraph to the top of the essay. This technique is very easy to enact practically – one simple cut-and-paste move – but difficult to enact emotionally because moving the conclusion to the beginning of an essay almost inevitably means erasing the current introduction.

This technique feels more painful to most writers than almost any other, and that psychological impediment is worth addressing so students can understand why making this move is the right thing to do.

Eliminate Minimum Page Lengths

For students who struggle to reach a minimum page length, deleting feels counterintuitive. Why would they erase an entire paragraph if the point of writing is to create as much material as possible?

Try to convince students that you value the quality of their writing more than the quantity, and prove that stance not only through your writing prompts and classroom conversations but also through your grading. When students see success in stronger, more tightly written work and recognize that you do not reward work based on length, they may be more willing to experiment with this technique, which has tremendous payoff in the quality of the work.

Overcoming Hesitation

When students recognize that a paragraph should be cut but struggle to cut it, encourage them to keep a “scraps” file on their computer. Rather than cutting the weak



introduction outright, they can move the paragraph to that file. Students feel reassured when their writing isn't gone forever, which makes deletion less painful. Of course, they won't use most or any of those scraps, but "moving" text is far easier than cutting it entirely, and it leads to the same outcome: a stronger essay.

Next Steps

Once students move the concluding paragraph to the introduction position, they should read the rest of their work critically to make the body of the essay match the new introduction. Often the supporting paragraphs can remain, but they will likely require some level of rewriting, especially in their topic sentences.

Doing this activity even once helps students see the value in free or fast writing: it leads them more quickly to the conclusion, which can then serve as a starting point for the next draft. Learning to readjust where they spend their writing time is a huge psychological shift, though, so start teaching this technique early in your time together, giving students more opportunities to practice it as the semester progresses.