INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Good essays and themes, like good plots, will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. While the reader experiences these parts sequentially, they may not be written in this order. During revision, the introduction and conclusion may be completely recast, as the composition takes on a shape of its own. Do not attempt to compose a perfect introduction and then confine yourself to a rigid template. Similarly, do not leave all consideration of the conclusion to the final phases of the writing process.

Keep in mind the purpose of introductions and conclusions:
- An introduction should establish the interest and importance of the topic and (for expository essays) state the thesis
- An introduction should draw the interest and respect of the reader (all types of writing)
- A conclusion should state the common idea that runs through the entire theme but that was not evident or comprehensible at first
- A conclusion should state the lesson learned from demonstrating the truth of the thesis or from following a distinct line of inquiry to its end

In other words, the introduction promises the reader something of value; the conclusion reveals the value earned.

Notice that these parts of the theme need not contain summaries or overviews. Give a summary only if you think that the reader may be confused by the many aspects of the topic. Bear in mind that in arithmetic a sum is not the same as a list of numbers. Similarly, an overview is worthwhile only when the impression from the whole scene is different from that of the individual elements making it up.

Some specific techniques to introduce:
- Begin with a “teaser” quotation that leads into the central idea or thesis - follow the teaser with an explanation before laying the ground for the thesis
- State an interesting generalization bearing on the major concepts in the essay or theme
- Give an original and vivid definition or description of material under analysis
- Provide necessary background information for understanding the thesis
- Use a topical reference that will establish a common ground between writer and reader

Some specific techniques to conclude:
- Reveal an aspect of the topic that has been latent or implicit all along
- Extend (do not repeat) the thesis to make a more complete or general assertion
- Explain the result or impact of the material presented in the theme
- Draw a moral (didactic) lesson from the material that was not evident at first
- End with a quotation that has a different meaning after a reading of the previous paragraphs
- Draw an analogy between your findings and another story, event, or concept

**Shortcuts?** Think about the value of your composition. Do not pre-list all the paragraph topics as part of the introduction. Do not mindlessly repeat the thesis statement in the conclusion.
Sample Introductions

**Teaser quotation with explanation and thesis, derived from the general topic of women’s roles in Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* –**

“What’s a Dress?”

So Father came out too and we went down to the spring and found Drusilla hiding behind the big beech, crouched down like she was trying to hide the skirt from Father even while he raised her up. “What’s a dress?” he said. “It don’t matter. Come. Get up, soldier.” (231)

At this moment, Colonel Sartoris’ finest, he asserts that Drusilla can live the way she chooses despite society’s expectations, symbolized by the restrictive female attire that she has been forced to resume after the Civil War. While she has earned his respect, however, she will find no satisfactory alternative to the rigidly prescribed duties of a respectable wife of her time. Ultimately, she will become an advocate for a fanatical and outdated sense of honor and male heroism. In *The Unvanquished*, by William Faulkner, Drusilla through her rebellion and failure provides both instruction and warning for Bayard in his own path to maturity.

**Generalization with comment, followed by thesis on the topic of wisdom in the *Book of Ruth* –**

From Gleaning to Scheming

Unconditional love and personal gain are usually assumed to be distinct, even totally opposite motives for behavior. Love, Saint Paul tells us, “seeketh not its own,” while the gospel warns that a rich man would have a tight squeeze to enter the narrow gate of Heaven. The wisdom expressed in the *Book of Ruth*, however, is more complex than these views. Ruth’s unconditional love for Naomi is revealed to be an essential trait that brings about prosperity and extends a very tangible blessing to Boaz and Naomi as well.

**Description followed by explanation and thesis on the topic of Hamlet’s internal conflict –**

Spirit of Health or Goblin Damned?

A young man who has had a good upbringing, including wealth, high status, and a good education, uncovers evidence that his father may have been murdered by his own brother, the young man’s uncle, who has assumed the father’s position in every respect. The evidence, however, is supernatural and not easily corroborated. In addition, almost everyone believes the uncle to be a good man. How does the young man go about sorting out his own feelings and determining the right course of action? Can he proceed without harming the people closest to him, including his friends, his lady love, and even his mother? Such is the dilemma for Hamlet, whose difficulties are both internal, or psychological, as well as external, or practical. Although
Hamlet has often been characterized as weak and indecisive, the foil characters in the play clearly expose the consequences of acting too quickly, too passionately, or too willfully.

Sample Conclusions

**Topic: The significance of weapons in Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished.*
**Thesis: In the antebellum society depicted in *The Unvanquished,* by William Faulkner, guns and swords symbolize the association between conventional manhood and the ability to fight and to kill.
**Conclusion with didactic statement –

Finding the sprig of verbena left for him on Drusilla’s pillow, Bayard may well reflect on his “splendid afternoon,” as he has faced up to his father’s murderer without resorting to violence. Not only has Bayard rejected the flawed logic of retribution, he also has come to see that to “live by the sword” is the same as “to die by the sword.” If the ability to use a sword or other lethal weapon is the traditional means by which a boy becomes a man, the ability to desist from violence must be the mark of a moral man. In his heroic response to his father’s death, Bayard proves that more than one kind of bravery is possible. Manhood and death need not be inseparable.

**Conclusion with analogy from another literary work, on the same topic –

In his brave but pacifist action, Bayard achieves a resolution to the moral dilemma posed by the murder of his father by Redmond. In this respect, Bayard contrasts with Hamlet, who faces a similar challenge and portrays a similar conviction to act appropriately and rationally. In Shakespeare’s play, however, Hamlet is drawn into Claudius’ web of violence and deceit by accepting Laertes’ invitation to take part in a fencing match, although both Hamlet and Horatio know that the match must be a ruse. Consequently, Hamlet carries out his revenge for the death of his father literally “by the sword” and dies in the process, along with several other hapless victims. Bayard, like Hamlet, is willing to risk his life for honor, but not others. Consequently, Bayard prevails in the face of tragedy. Hamlet does not.

**Conclusion with cumulative quotation on the topic of Hamlet’s internal conflict –

In the fulfilling last minutes of the play, Hamlet at last carries out the ghost’s request by forcing Claudius to swallow his own poisoned wine. Despite his care and deliberation, however, Hamlet suddenly realizes that only Horatio understands the situation. To the survivors, and to Denmark in general, Hamlet will appear to be a madman, a traitor, a villain. Consequently, he uses his last words to beg Horatio, who offers to die with Hamlet, to live in order clear his name. The heroic action, then, must be recounted and explained in order to be realized, as the man of many words must trust his friend to authorize his life. Horatio’s courage will be of this verbal kind, which Hamlet himself has exemplified throughout his ordeal: “. . . Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, / To tell my story” (V.ii.370-372).