

Opening and Closing Paragraphs: Just How Do They Work?

In an academic essay one is expected to do the following:

1. Tell the reader what s/he will read (opening paragraph)
2. Tell the reader (middle paragraphs)
3. Reinforce for the reader the main point(s) s/he read (closing paragraph)

Monotonous? Yes. However, it is the best way to check, double check, and **MAKE SURE** the essay is complete. The opening and closing paragraphs are probably two of the most challenging to write. In the opening paragraph, the writer needs to hone in on what the essay is all about. The closing paragraph needs to bring every thing full-circle.

OPENING PARAGRAPH

Tell Readers What They Will Read*

How can I start my paper?

What information should I put into an opening paragraph?

An opening paragraph should do the following three things:

1. Offer the reader the **BIG PICTURE** of the essay. Consider using an attention-getter like one of the following (These are just a few ideas, you might think of others):
 - an appropriate quotation
 - an interesting fact or statistics
 - an example
 - an anecdote
 - vivid description
 - definition
2. Avoid the following worn out, clichéd techniques:
 - asking rhetorical questions to which you and the reader already know the answer
 - quoting a dictionary definition
3. Presents the thesis. This is important because it shapes the direction of the essay. Here are some questions to help you identify your thesis:
 - what's your point about the topic?
 - what is your argument?
 - what is your angle?
 - Remember: your thesis promises readers what the essay will be about.

* Some writers find it easier to write the middle paragraphs first and the opening paragraph last. This way you can read what you have, see what it is you are saying, and shape a thesis and opening paragraph based on that.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS

Tell the Reader

The middle of your essay develops your thesis by carrying through on your opening promise. These paragraphs should do the following:

1. The first sentence of each paragraph should show a direct connection to your thesis.
2. Present points that support your thesis.
3. Offer detailed explanation of each point.
4. Provide examples to illustrate each point.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH

Reinforce Main Ideas

This is the writer's last chance to leave an impression on the reader.

Different types of essays require different types of closings.

1. Research Papers or Informative/Reporting Style Essays
 - Summarize the key points of the essay.
2. Position Papers or Argument/Persuasion Style Essays
 - ties key points together by drawing a conclusion, thus, bringing the discussion full circle
 - echoes but does not repeat the opening thesis or supporting points.