

Introductions, Conclusions, and Development

AP English Language and Composition

Introductions and Conclusions in a Text

Unit 4 covers the two positions in a text where a writer's choices are most visible - the beginning and the end - and completes the CED's list of **methods of development**.

- The **introduction** 引言 of an argument **introduces the subject and/or the writer** to the audience. It may orient the reader, establish the exigence and context, and gain attention.
- The **conclusion** 结论 **brings the argument to a unified end**. It may present the argument's thesis, explain its significance, or situate the argument in a broader context.

Note the verb in the second: *unified*. A conclusion is not a summary; it is the point at which the parts are shown to have been one argument.

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

On the exam, both are worth writing well but neither is worth writing long. A useful discipline:

- An introduction that **positions the subject and states a defensible thesis** in two or three sentences is complete. Everything else in a timed essay is better spent on evidence and commentary.
- A conclusion that **says what follows from the argument** - its significance, or its wider implication - does more than one that restates the paragraphs.

The weakest conclusion is the one that re-lists what the essay already said. The reader has just read it. Say instead what it means, or what it obliges.

Identifying the Overarching Thesis

The CED adds a precise refinement here: **a thesis statement may preview the line of reasoning of an argument** - and then, immediately, *this is not to say that a thesis statement must list the reasons*.

That double statement is worth holding, because both errors are common. A thesis that previews nothing leaves the essay shapeless. A thesis mechanically listing three reasons is not required and often produces a rigid essay that cannot develop.

Writing a Thesis Statement

For your own writing, the practical version:

- The thesis must be **defensible**. Non-negotiable, and it is the whole of the thesis point.
- It **may** indicate the shape of the reasoning. Do it when the shape is genuinely load-bearing; do not do it as a formula.
- It should be **specific enough to constrain what follows**. A thesis so broad that any paragraph could belong under it is not directing the essay.

Recognizing Methods of Development

The method	What the writer does	Reach for it when...
Narration	details of real experience, plus reflection on them	the audience must <i>FEEL</i> the situation before judging it
Cause-effect	present a cause, assert its effects - or work backwards	they accept the facts but not the connection
Comparison-contrast	state a CATEGORY of comparison, then the similarities and differences	they judge better against something already familiar
Definition	relate the characteristics that make the thing what it is	they are applying the wrong standard
Description	features and sensory detail	abstraction is the obstacle - they cannot see it

The right-hand column is the decision. The method follows from what the audience needs, not from the topic.

Choose the method the reasoning needs, not the one the topic suggests

Unit 3 covered narration and cause-effect. Unit 4 adds the rest:

- Developing through **comparison-contrast** 比较对照: writers **present a category of comparison** and then examine similarities and differences within it. The *category* is the part students omit - a comparison without a stated basis is two descriptions side by side.
- Developing through **definition or description** 定义与描写: writers relate the **characteristics, features, or sensory details** 特征与感官细节 of a subject.

Definition is more powerful than it looks. An argument that turns on what a word means - what counts as *success*, as *fairness*, as *progress* - is an argument that has moved to the ground where it can actually be won.

Using Methods of Development

The choice is rhetorical. Ask what the audience needs before they will accept your claim:

- They need to **see** it, and abstraction is the obstacle: **description**.
- They accept the facts but not the connection: **cause-effect**.

- They are applying the wrong standard: **definition**.
- They will judge better against something familiar: **comparison-contrast**.
- They need to feel the situation: **narration**.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Question 3 argument prompt asks you to take a position on whether a common practice is beneficial. A student who reaches for description writes a vivid paragraph nobody disputes. A student who reaches for **definition** writes: *"Whether the practice is beneficial depends on what we count as benefit. If benefit means measurable short-term gain, the practice succeeds; if it means durable capability, the same evidence shows it failing."* That paragraph has relocated the argument onto ground where the evidence actually decides something - which is the kind of move the **sophistication** point exists to reward.

Exam tips

- Introductions should be **short and load-bearing**: position the subject, state a defensible thesis, move on.
- A conclusion that **restates** earns least. Say what the argument means or obliges.
- A thesis **may** preview the reasoning; it is **not required** to list reasons. Both errors are common.
- **Comparison needs a stated category**. Without one you have written two descriptions, not a comparison.
- **Definition** is the strongest move available in an argument essay whose terms are contestable.
- Pick a method of development from **what the audience needs**, not from what the topic suggests.