

Writing Better Introductions and Conclusions for English Argumentation Essays

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Learning to write effective introductions and conclusions is an important goal for developing writers. This paper investigates how writers develop the ability to construct effective introductions and conclusions for their English argumentation essays. For more than a decade, we have analyzed English and Japanese writing by diverse groups, ranging from novice to advanced Japanese EFL writers and North American L1 writers (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012, 2013; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009; Rinnert et al., 2015). In this paper, we identify characteristics of stronger and weaker introductions and conclusions in English argumentation essays by these writers. Based on the analysis, we formulate some practical ways to help our students (and ourselves) improve the way to write these essential parts of every text.

Keywords: English argumentation essays, coherence, engaging readers, introduction, conclusion, components

INTRODUCTION: AIMS OF THE STUDY

The goal of this paper is to examine how writers can construct introductions and conclusions that engage their readers and contribute to higher quality texts. Introductions and conclusions are important parts of any text. They can be challenging for experienced writers in their first language (L1), and they often prove to be even more daunting for writers in a foreign language (FL). Therefore, it seems worthwhile to try to gain a better understanding of how writers develop the ability to construct effective introductions and conclusions.

Introductions and conclusions differ according to the genre and discourse type of the writing (e.g., research papers, reports, expository

essays). For this study, we looked at argumentation essays, one of the most common types of writing taught in formal classes. By argumentation essay, we mean that the writer takes a position for or against a given topic and supports the position with evidence that could persuade the reader that the position is reasonable.

METHOD

For the analysis, we examined a total of 53 English argumentation essays written by six groups of writers. Five of the groups were Japanese:

Novice 1 (Nov1): First-year university students who had received intensive preparatory training in both Japanese and English writing before taking university entrance essay exams;

Returnee (Ret): First- (or second-) year university students who had come back to Japan after spending 2.5 to 3 years at overseas high schools;

Experienced Group 1 (Exp1): Third-year university students who had never studied overseas;

Experienced Group 2 (Exp2): Fourth-year university students who had spent one year studying at universities overseas; and

Experienced Group 3 (Exp3): Graduate students and teachers who had spent at least 3 years studying and working overseas after their undergraduate degrees.

The last group were native English speaking writers:

North American (NA): Third- and fourth-year university students in the U.S. or Canada who were studying Japanese as a foreign language.

The English essays we analyzed were written under the same basic conditions: no time limit and use of dictionaries allowed. Each writer wrote on one of two topics:

For the Novice and Returnee writers:

1. University students living alone vs. living with family
2. University students traveling alone vs. in a group

For the Experienced and NA writers:

1. For or against elementary school students learning a foreign language
2. For or against elderly people living with family

The same writers also wrote a Japanese essay on the other topic. After they had completed both essays, we asked the writers to reflect on their English and Japanese writing, including their perceptions of similarities and differences between them. (For more information about the series of studies the essays were taken from, see Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012, 2013; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009; Rinnert, et al., 2015.) To supplement our text analysis in this paper, we occasionally draw on some of those reflections, as well as our analysis of the Japanese essays on the same topics. We also refer to the results of an evaluation study of some of the essays by two highly experienced native English-speaking writing teachers in Japan.

In this paper, we first look at introductions; next, at conclusions; and then, at some of the ways introductions and conclusions work together to contribute to the quality of the whole essay. We conclude with a list of pedagogical implications drawn from the study.

ARGUMENTATION ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS

A text's introduction could be its most important part, at least in terms of attracting the reader. This is because an interesting introduction will encourage the reader to continue, whereas an uninteresting one will likely lead the reader to stop reading or to continue only reluctantly, which could result in a negative evaluation of the text. Because introductions are important, much effort has been devoted to identifying the features of effective introductions. The best known of these is probably Swales's (1990) characterization of research article introductions, the Create a Research Space (CARS) model. This model specifies the moves a research article writer can make to contextualize

and establish a niche for the research, as well as to identify a gap in the current literature that the article aims to fill.

Writing teachers are interested in how to help their students learn to construct introductions in a variety of genres, and many writing textbooks include instruction on how to create effective introductions. For example, one introductory English academic writing textbook (Davis & Liss, 2006, p. 8) identifies three components of introductions to five-paragraph essays: (a) a “hook” (an opening sentence or two that grabs the reader’s interest); (b) background information about the topic; and (c) a thesis statement (containing the specific topic and “controlling idea” for the essay). Another (Oshima & Hogue, 2006, p. 59) characterizes an introductory paragraph as having two parts: (a) general statements that introduce the topic and interest the reader and (b) a thesis statement that gives the specific topic and may also include a listing of sub-topics or the organization of the essay.

In order to explore how the writers in our study constructed the introductions in their argumentation essays, we identified the components of the introductions they wrote. We found five common components, which are listed and defined in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Salient Components of Argumentation Introductions

Component (abbreviation)	Definition/Explanation
Announcement (A)	Stating overall goal, procedure and/or structure for the essay, or raising the topic of the essay (can include rhetorical questions)
Position (P)	Stating or implying the writer’s opinion (claim) for or against the issue addressed in the essay
Context (C)	Background: Presenting general, personal, and/or specific information about the topic Raising issue: Referring to contrastive sides of an argument, alternative view, or controversy on the topic
Focus (F)	Defining terms, establishing perspective for the argument, narrowing/clarifying the topic or issue, and/or setting conditions for the argument
Preview (Prev)	Introducing what is to be discussed: General content of the argument or specific content of one or more of the main points/reasons

To see an example of each of these components, let us look at the following introduction by a North American writer (NA-13), which was

the only one that contained all five components. (Throughout this paper, excerpts from the participants' writing is presented as it appeared in the original, with only spelling corrected if necessary.)

Sample Introduction 1. NA-13, Announcement + Context + Position + Preview + Focus

^(A)Should elderly people live or not live with family? ^(C)This issue has many different viewpoints. ^(P)My opinion is that elderly parents should not live with family ^(Prev)for the following reasons: hardship on adult children, lack of freedom for both parties (adult children and elderly parents), and discouraging retirement planning. ^(F)One caveat is that I will define family as adult children of an elderly person.

This introduction begins with an Announcement (A) of the topic in the form of a question; continues in the second sentence with a general Context (C) statement that characterizes the issue as having “different viewpoints”; states the writer’s Position (P) in the following sentence (underlined), along with a specific Preview (Prev) of the reasons in the same sentence; and ends with a Focus (F) in the last sentence that defines the term “family” in this essay.

To compare the introductions across the groups, we computed their average length and number of different components. Table 2 shows these averages by group.

TABLE 2. Introduction Length and Number of Components: Averages by Group

	Nov1	Ret	Exp1	Exp2	Exp3	NA
English						
Words	20.0	56.4	62.4	53.9	77.3	92.4
Components	1.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.8

Note. Nov1 = Novice Group 1; Ret = Returnees; Exp1 = Experienced Group 1; Exp2 = Experienced Group 2; Exp3 = Experienced Group 3; NA = North Americans.

As we can see in the table, there appears to be a developmental trend toward longer and somewhat more complex introductions as writers gain more experience. The average number of words was less for Novice EFL, greater for Experienced Group 3, and even greater for North Americans. However, the number of components did not differ so much across the groups. Although the number of components was low for

Novices (1.5), it was very similar for Returnees and all the experienced EFL groups (2.3–2.4), and only a little higher for North American L1 writers (2.8).

We also looked at how often each component occurred to see which ones were the most popular across the groups. Table 3 shows an overview of how many writers across the groups used each component. As we can see, Position was used by a majority of writers in every group, and Context was almost as widely used. However, Announcements seemed to be less popular among more experienced writers, and there were big differences among groups in the use of Focus and Previews. Most notably, Focus was used often only by Experienced Group 3, but the use of Previews varied considerably across the groups. (We will look more closely at the use of Previews in the section below.)

TABLE 3. Frequency of Introduction Components by Group

Group	A	P	C	F	Prev
Nov1 (N = 8)	◎	●	◎	•	–
Ret (N = 7)	◎	●	●	–	◎
Exp1 (N = 9)	•	●	●	–	•
Exp2 (N = 9)	◎	●	●	–	◎
Exp3 (N = 4)	–	●	●	●	–
NAmer (N = 16)	•	●	●	•	◎

Note. A: Announcement; P: Position (explicit, implied or conditional); C: Context; F: Focus; Prev: Preview.

(N =): Number of argumentation essays for the group; ● : Feature of 50% or more of essays; ◎ : Feature of 29% to 49% of essays; • : Feature of at least one essay, but less than 29% of essays; – : Feature of no essays.

In addition to the above analyses, we also looked at how individual writers combined the components in their introductions. Looking at all the results, we found three main trends that may help us to understand how introductions to argumentation essays change with more writing experience. First, as pointed out above, introductions tend to become longer and more complex. Second, introductions become less formulaic and more individually crafted to fit particular audiences. Third, typical

placement of position statements inside EFL writers' introductions appears to change with more experience. Let us now look at each of these findings.

Length and Complexity

One obvious difference between inexperienced and experienced writers was whether or not there was a separate introduction paragraph. Half of the Novice EFL writers (4 out of 8) did not have separate introductory paragraphs in their English essays. In contrast, virtually all the other essays had distinct introductory paragraphs. It therefore seems that creating a separate introductory paragraph is a first developmental step toward writing an effective introduction.

Among the more experienced writers, Experienced Group 2 tended to have relatively short introductions. For example, one writer's (Exp2-6) English introduction, shown below, has three components, expressed in one long and one short sentence. It consists of a Position statement (underlined) and Preview in the same sentence, followed, in the second sentence, by an Announcement of the organization of the essay to come.

Sample Introduction 2. Exp2-6: Position + Preview + Announcement

^(P)I think that old people should live with their family members ^{(Prev);} in terms of four points, old people's loneliness, preventing senility, immediate help by family members and good effects for grandchildren's growth. ^(A)Now I will explain each of the points.

In this introduction, the writer makes her intent very clear and leads the reader smoothly into the body of the essay. However, if the writer added some Context, for example, some background information to situate the argument, the opening paragraph could draw in the reader more effectively.

In fact, providing extended Context may be the easiest way to lengthen an introduction and make it more interesting at the same time. For instance, let us examine the following introduction (see Sample Introduction 3) by an Experienced Group 1 writer (Exp1-1). This introduction begins with five and a half sentences of Context (C), consisting of a personal story related to the topic, followed by general background on the issue and mention of the opposing side at the beginning of the last sentence. The last sentence continues with a

Position (P) statement (underlined) and a Preview (Prev). In this introduction, the writer tried to attract the interest of the reader by pointing out both the relevance of the topic to our daily lives and the importance of the issue. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement of potential criticism of the writer's position (opposing viewpoints). Then, after a clear statement of the writer's position, there is an overview of the argument in the form of a Preview of the supporting reasons developed in the essay.

Sample Introduction 3. Exp1-1: Context + Position + Preview

^(C)Yesterday, I talked with one of my friends on campus. He is from Indonesia and he cannot speak Japanese well, so we always talk in English. These days English is coming more and more important. If you can use English, you can communicate with people from all over the world. However, it is said that Japanese people are not good at speaking English, so many professors and school teachers are trying to teach English with elementary school children. There are many criticism of this current of early English education, but ^(P)I strongly agree to this idea, ^(Prev)because it can help children to get not only skills of speaking English, but also skills of communicating with people from other countries of cultures.

Many of the Returnee and North American writers wrote introductions for their argumentation essays that were developed in similar ways to the one above by Exp1-1. Most commonly, besides a Position statement, these involved extended Context, often mentioning both sides of an issue; a Preview of the supporting reasons; or both Context and Preview. These components fit the textbook description of effective introductions, given earlier, and were reportedly learned by most of these writers in their secondary school English writing instruction outside Japan. In the case of the Experienced Group 1 writers, some of them were enrolled in an academic writing class taught by an American teacher at the time of the data collection. From the interviews, we learned that they tended to consciously apply what they had learned about introductions (and conclusions) in that class.

More Original Introductions by Advanced Writers

In comparison with the other experienced EFL and L1 English writers, the English introductions by the most experienced EFL group

(Exp3) were not only longer, but also more varied. In fact, no two introductions contained the same combination and ordering of components. This suggests that these writers were reshaping rather than simply reusing components. Unlike the introductions by the other groups, those by these writers were non-formulaic. They included no cases of Announcements or Previews, and they were characterized by frequent use of Context and Focus (limiting and clarifying the argument). In fact, these writers used Focus in 75% of their introductions. For example, the following introduction, by a member of Experienced Group 3 (Exp3-6), consists entirely of extended Focus and a Position (underlined). The essay begins with a question, which we considered as the title, and the introduction serves to answer the question.

Sample Introduction 4. Exp3-6: Focus + Position

Early foreign language education should start with elementary school children?
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<p>^(F)I think it depends on how many hours are to be spent for foreign language classes. If it is longer than or the same as the time spent for national language classes, it is just too much. It also depends on whether foreign language education is compulsory or optional. If it is meant for all elementary school children, ^(P)<u>I do not agree with it.</u></p>

The writer carefully limits the topic according to the number of hours to be spent on foreign language teaching in the elementary school classroom (either more or less than for national language learning) and whether the instruction is required or optional, and then expresses her conditional Position against it. By limiting the topic and expressing the Position conditionally, the writer conveys a sense that she has thought carefully about the issue and is approaching it in both a cautious and realistic way, which could make her argument more credible to the reader.

Placement of Position Statements

One thing that has intrigued us for a long time is the location of Position statements in the introduction. Many of the introductions in our set of essays by EFL writers started out with a Position statement in the first sentence, as we saw in Sample 2 above. This is quite different from the English writing textbook advice referred to earlier and has been

noted in the literature. Basically, it has been observed that L1 English writers tend to place their main point (thesis) at or near the end of their introductory paragraphs, while many Japanese writers place their main point at the very beginning of the introduction (Hirose, 2001; Sato, 2014). For example, Hirose (2003) found that all but two of 15 writers (87%) in her study put their position statements in the first sentence of both their L1 Japanese and L2 English short argumentation essays.

We found a similar pattern in our study. A great many of the L1 English writers (75%) placed their position statement in the *last* sentence of their English introductions, whereas a large number of L1 Japanese writers (71%) placed their position statement in the *first* sentence of their Japanese introductions. In contrast, the experienced EFL writers fell in between these two L1 groups. In their English essays, equal numbers (42%) placed their positions in the first or the last sentence. That is, they did not follow the tendencies of either L1 group. These findings suggest that the Japanese EFL writers may have adopted features from both languages and incorporated them into an overlapping repertoire of writing knowledge that they could choose to apply in either language. (This suggestion fits the notion of a merged repertoire of knowledge, which we have discussed elsewhere, e.g., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012.) Nevertheless, it may be beneficial to tell L2 English writers that English audiences generally expect a position statement to come at or near the end of the introduction.

ARGUMENTATION ESSAY CONCLUSIONS

Like introductions, conclusions play an important role for the reader. It is a well-known psychological principle that endings – of words, sentences, and larger pieces of discourse – stand out and are more easily remembered than beginning or middle parts. This implies that strong endings can be memorable and ultimately make an argument more convincing for the reader. In fact, in our experimental study of English essay evaluation by different groups of readers in Japan (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2001), we found that ratings of conclusions correlated highly with ratings of the overall quality of the whole essays. Moreover, a substantial number of the members of all groups of evaluators (28% to 38%) offered positive or, more often, negative comments on the

conclusions. Therefore, it seems clear that learning to write effective conclusions is an important goal for developing writers.

TABLE 4. Salient Components of Argumentation Conclusions

Component (abbreviation)	Definition/Explanation
Conclusion Marker (Mkr)	Explicitly signaling the beginning of the conclusion with a discourse marker (e.g., <i>In conclusion</i> , or <i>For the reasons above</i>)
Position (P)	Stating, restating, or implying the writer's opinion for or against the issue addressed in the essay; implied positions may be presented indirectly as part of another separate component; positions may also be conditional (dependent on specific conditions being met)
Concession (Cs)	Recognizing the other side of the issue and/or problems with the side being taken
Summary (Sum)	Condensing one or more of the points of the argument already made in the body (can be very general, e.g., <i>more merits than demerits</i>)
Extension	Interpreting the content of the essay more deeply, offering a solution to a problem related to the argument, making a new proposal, or showing future concern
Text-based (Ext-T)	
Writer-based (Ext-W)	Giving personal comments or an emotional appeal

To examine our writers' conclusions, we identified the six conclusion components listed above in Table 4. None of the conclusions contained all six components, and very few contained more than four components. Therefore, we chose the three typical sample conclusions below to illustrate the full range of components we found.

The first sample conclusion is by a member of Experienced Group 1 (Exp1-2).

Sample Conclusion 1. Exp1-2: Marker + Summary + Position + Text-based extension

^(Mkr)In conclusion, ^(P)I strongly think that early foreign language education should start with elementary school children. ^(Sum)This is because younger children can learn easily and can have a lot of opportunities. ^(Ext-T)Furthermore, I think which language required to take should discuss in any country.

This conclusion has four components. The Conclusion Marker (Mkr, "In conclusion") is followed by the Position statement (P, underlined). Then

there is a Summary (Sum) of the reasons given in the essay. Finally, there is a Text-based Extension (Ext-T) proposing that every country should discuss which foreign language to require, an idea that was not mentioned earlier in the essay.

The second sample is by a North American writer (NA-14).

Sample Conclusion 2. NA-14: Summary + Position (implied) + Writer-based extension

(Sum with P(imp)) Due to both the greater number of strong language learning environments and the comparative strength of a youngster's mind when facing the task of language learning, the answer to when the best time to begin foreign language education is clear. (Ext-W) I only wish that I had been given the opportunity to study more languages as a child.

This conclusion starts with a Summary of the writer's argument in favor of foreign language education in elementary school, which includes an implied Position statement (P(imp), underlined) that does not explicitly state his position. It ends with a Writer-based Extension (Ext-W) that expresses the writer's personal wish that he had been given the chance to learn a foreign language earlier.

The third sample is also by a North American writer (NA-2).

Sample Conclusion 3. NA-2: Marker + Concession + Position (conditional) + Summary

(Mkr) Ultimately, (Cs) the decision to live with family or not is one that depends on the family and the elderly person in question. (P(cond)) A reasonably healthy elderly person, however, should not have to live in-residence with family if (Sum) it compromises their sense of independence or causes them emotional distress.

This last conclusion starts with a Marker ("Ultimately"), continues with a Concession (Cs) to the idea that some families may have different needs, and ends with a conditional Position (P(cond), underlined) and Summary of the gist of the argument given in the essay against elderly living with family.

For the conclusions, like the introductions, we computed the average lengths and numbers of components across groups. We also counted the number of writers who used each of the components and examined how the different writers combined the components. The lengths of the

conclusions are reported in Table 5, and an overview of the distribution of the components across the groups in L1 and L2 is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 5. Conclusion Length and Number of Components: Averages by Group

	Nov1	Ret	Exp1	Exp2	Exp3	NA
Words	21.8	48.7	38.7	45.2	81.0	83.8
Components	1.8	2.1	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.8

As shown in Table 5, we found that the conclusions generally tended to get longer with more writing experience, even though the average number of components did not change much. We also found, as seen in Table 6, that Conclusion Markers, Position statements, and Summaries were very commonly used across the groups.

TABLE 6. Frequency of Conclusion Components Across Groups and Languages

Group	Mkr	P	Cs	Sum	ExT	ExW
Nov1 (N = 8)	●	●	–	◎	•	–
Ret (N = 7)	●	●	◎	●	•	–
Exp1 (N = 9)	●	●	•	●	•	•
Exp2 (N = 9)	●	●	–	●	•	–
Exp3 (N = 4)	•	●	●	●	●	–
NAmer (N = 16)	•	●	◎	●	◎	•

Note. Mkr: Conclusion marker; P: Position (explicit, implied or conditional); Cs: Concession; Sum: Summary; ExT: Text-Based Extension; ExW: Writer-Based Extension. (N =): Number of argumentation essays for the group; ● : Feature of 50% or more of essays; ◎: Feature of 29% to 49% of essays; • : Feature of at least one essay, but less than 29% of essays; – : Feature of no essays.

In Table 6, we can see a possible tendency toward more use of Concessions with more writing experience. Like Counterarguments, Concessions bring in reference to the opposing side, so they can be a way of acknowledging possible objections from the reader.

Finally, by looking at the ways writers combined components, we found some interesting patterns in the use of Extensions across the groups. In the rest of this section, we would like to discuss these patterns and how they may relate to changes in writing instruction in recent years.

In our original analysis of the experienced EFL writers' conclusions (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2007; summarized in Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009), we reported that the less experienced undergraduates (Exp1) used many more extensions in Japanese (90%) than in English (20%), but the more experienced undergraduates (Exp2) did not use many extensions in either language. Interpreting our findings, we suggested that many of these EFL writers were applying learned L2 writing conventions and in some cases transferring them to their L1 writing. For example, those with overseas experience (Exp2) tended not to use extensions across languages, even though some of them perceived that Japanese conclusions should include some kind of extended or future perspective. We noted that the reported perceptions of many of these student writers appeared to match L2 English writing textbook advice about conclusions (e.g., Langan, 2000; Reid, 1988; Smalley & Hank, 1982), particularly the importance of concisely rephrasing the main points in different words and not adding any new ideas at the end.

When we expanded the analysis of conclusions to cover argumentation essays by the North American and L1 Japanese writers, we found that the L1 Japanese conclusions tended to include more extended ideas, as opposed to greater use of specific summaries in the L1 English conclusions. Thus, we observed that the L1 Japanese writers often ended their essays with a deeper interpretation of the content, while the L1 English writers frequently presented a final synopsis of the gist of their argument to appeal to readers (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012). We also noted that the most experienced EFL writers (Exp3) used more extensions in their English than in their Japanese essays, which we could not explain, other than to suggest that it may have been related to their L2 disciplinary training.

However, our current reanalysis of the conclusions reveals a more complex picture of the use of extensions in English conclusions. First, for all groups, text-based extensions were much more frequent than writer-based extensions; in fact, writer-based extensions were not used at all by Experienced Group 2 or 3 (see Table 6). Second, contrary to our earlier findings, when we added together the text-based and writer-based

extensions, we found that many L1 English writers (63%) used extensions. These findings, together with the fact that half of the most experienced writers (Exp3) also used extensions in their English conclusions, suggest that going beyond a simple restatement of the position and summary of the argument, especially by using a text-based extension, may be a productive way to conclude English argumentation essays.

This suggestion may reflect something of a shift from the earlier emphasis in writing instruction (in textbooks written in the 1980s and as late as 2000, referred to above) on not including any new ideas in English conclusions. In fact, the two more recent writing textbooks referred to earlier (in the section on introductions) give similar recommendations to include extended ideas in academic English essay conclusions. According to Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 72), the conclusion has three purposes: (a) to signal the end of the essay by using a transition signal (such as, “In conclusion”); (b) to remind the reader of the main points of the essay; and (c) to leave the reader with a strong final message, for example, by making a prediction or recommendation, or suggesting results or consequences. Likewise, Davis and Liss (2006) say that the conclusion brings the essay to a close by restating “the thesis of the introduction in different words” to connect the conclusion to the introduction, and that it may also (a) give advice; (b) “make a prediction or ask as question”; or (c) “provide new insights or discoveries that the writer has gained through writing the essay” (p. 11). Thus, there is no mention in either textbook of avoiding any new ideas in the conclusion; instead, both suggest ending with an appeal to the reader in the form of a text-based extension (e.g., a prediction or a suggestion), or else, according to the second book, a writer-based one (i.e., what the writer has personally learned in the process of writing).

Further support for including extensions is seen in reflections the North American writers made on their L1 English conclusions. When asked about what they paid attention to when writing conclusions in their English essays, almost half (47%) referred only to restating their main point, e.g., “Summarizing the most important points succinctly and memorably” (NA-15). But a substantial number (37%) also mentioned going beyond what was already said to include something new. For example, one writer said that in both his English and Japanese conclusions, he was concerned with:

Restatement of my thesis/argument and possible applications/prospects concerning the future. Also suggestions for further improvement or ideas for development of the subject of my argument. (Interview with NA-8)

In sum, then, we can advise that developing writers could be encouraged to write longer conclusions that include text-based extensions. For example, one of the more highly rated essays by an Experienced Group 2 student (Exp2-1) contains a conclusion, shown below, that is twice as long (96 words) as the average for that group (45.2 words).

Sample Conclusion 4. Exp2-1: P + Sum + Ext-T

^(P)Having foreign language classes with elementary school children will be a great opportunity for the children. ^(Sum)They can easily learn new languages and have chances to think global. The lack of other subjects class hours and the importance of the mother tongue are the things people who disagree worry about, but we cannot say that the education levels of other subjects will get down. This might be the charge to look over the curriculum of the subject. ^(Ext-T)Foreign language classes will be a good material for children to make progress for their knowledge and their heart.

This conclusion starts with a restatement of the Position (underlined). It next continues with a detailed Summary that includes the counterargument and refutations developed in the body of the essay. It then ends with a text-based extension that goes a bit beyond the argument in the body to encompass benefits not just for the children's knowledge but also for their hearts. Although the conclusion alone cannot account for the relatively high overall quality score given to this essay (5.25 out of 7), it can be said to leave the reader with a sense that the writer has presented a comprehensive and thoughtful argument.

So how do introductions and conclusions together relate to the overall evaluation of essays? In the next section, we would like to consider how these two parts, in combination with each other and the rest of the text, can contribute to, or detract from, the quality of an essay.

INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS WORKING TOGETHER

We would like to begin by focusing on Previews in introductions and Summaries in conclusions of essays. First, let us look at the similar roles they serve and why they might pose something of a problem for our EFL writers. Then, we can go a step further to reconsider some of our earlier interpretations of the use of these components in light of their functions and how they, together with other components, may relate to essay quality. To do this, we will look at two individual essays. In the process, we hope to draw some implications for ways to empower writers to construct more effective introductions and conclusions for their argumentation essays.

Looking at the definitions of Preview and Summary in Tables 1 and 4, we can see that they basically serve the same function of condensing the content of the argument. The only difference is that the Preview appears near the beginning of the essay, and the Summary, at the end. In essence, then, if a writer includes both a Preview and a Summary in an argumentation essay, the same argument is being repeated in three different places: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. As pointed out many years ago by John Hinds (1987, p. 144), this format follows the traditional advice for making an American English speech: “Tell ’em what you’re going to tell ’em, tell ’em, then tell ’em what you told ’em.” This formula has definite advantages, especially for oral presentations, because it makes the main points clear and memorable for the audience. However, it can also run the risk of conveying a feeling of unnecessary repetition, especially in a short written text. In fact, in our evaluation study (2001), mentioned above, we found that this kind of redundancy in some of the essays was criticized by members of all three groups of Japanese raters (inexperienced and experienced student writers and teachers), though not by the L1 English speakers.

The above considerations suggest there may be some resistance to the use of both a Preview and a Summary in these essays, especially by Japanese writers. So, we decided to count how many writers used both components in the same essay, as compared to those who used just one or the other, or neither. Table 7 summarizes what we found. As we can see in the table, including both components in the same essay is not the most popular option for any of the groups, except the North Americans

(although at 38%, it still does not constitute a majority of writers in the group). Most strikingly, none of the Novice or Experienced Group 3 writers included both a Preview and a Summary in any of their essays. Moreover, for all the groups except the North American writers in English, the choice of Summary alone was more frequent than – or in a few cases, the same frequency as – the choice of both Preview and Summary together. Finally, we can see that in most cases, the use of a Preview, a Summary, or both, is more common than leaving the two components out of the essay. Overall, these findings suggest that it may not be necessary to include both a Preview and a Summary in the same essay, and that Summaries may be more highly valued than Previews when only one is included.

TABLE 7. Use of Preview and Summary in English Argumentation Essays

Group	Both		Preview Only		Summary Only		Neither	
	(+Prev	+Sum)	(+Prev	–Sum)	(–Prev	+Sum)	(–Prev	–Sum)
Nov1	0%		0%		38%		63%	
Returnee	43%		0%		43%		14%	
Exp1	33%		11%		44%		11%	
Exp2	33%		0%		44%		22%	
Exp3	0%		0%		50%		50%	
NA	38%		25%		31%		6%	

Note. +: present; –: not present; Prev: Preview; Sum: Summary; bolded entry: over 30%.

The concerns about redundancy discussed above, along with the findings reported in Table 7, may also help us to qualify some of our earlier findings regarding general versus specific Previews and Summaries. As we mentioned above, both the Preview and Summary can range from a general overview of the argument to a detailed synopsis of specific points discussed in the essay. In earlier publications (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2007; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012), we reported some differences across languages in the use of general versus specific Previews and Summaries. For example, we found proportionally more use of general than specific Previews in Japanese by our undergraduate EFL writers (Exp1 and Exp2), and we also found that the Japanese writers’ L1 conclusions tended to include more general Summaries, as opposed to more use of specific Summaries in the North American writers’ L1 English conclusions. However, it now seems clear that it is not enough to look at introduction and conclusion components

in isolation. In fact, it is highly likely that they are interrelated, and they may often be tightly connected. For example, in the present analysis we found that many of the more experienced writers who included an explicit Position statement in the introduction chose to use an implied Position in the conclusion. Similarly, some writers who presented a specific Preview in the introduction made their Summary more general in the conclusion, and vice versa. In sum, then, it appears necessary to look at both the introduction and the conclusion in the context of a whole essay to clarify their roles more precisely.

So how can introductions and conclusions work together to weaken or strengthen an essay? Let us now look at two essays that illustrate each of these cases (weakening and strengthening).

In the first essay, by an Experienced Group 1 writer (Exp1-5), the introduction and conclusion, along with poor language use (average 3.5 out of 7), detract from an otherwise relatively highly evaluated essay (with content scores averaging 5.2, and structure scores averaging 5.75 out of 7), yielding an overall quality score of five out of seven. In fact, one of the evaluators specifically pointed out the weaknesses of this essay as “background missing, intro and conclusion weak” (evaluator 2).

So why were the introduction and conclusion of this essay considered so weak? One obvious possibility is the length. Both are relatively much shorter than the averages for this group (introduction: 29 words, compared to 62.4 average for Exp1; conclusion: 27 words, compared to 38.7 average). However, in terms of the number of components, they are actually higher than the averages for the group (introduction: three components, compared to 2.4 average; conclusion: three components, compared to 2.9 average). The introduction starts with an explicit Position statement in favor of elderly living with family, continues with one sentence of Context that mentions the writer’s personal background living with her grandmother, and ends with an Announcement of the writer’s intention of using that background as a basis for the essay. The conclusion starts with a one-sentence general Summary of the writer’s argument in favor of elderly living with family, which includes an implied Position (P(imp), underlined), and ends with a Writer-based Extension (Ext-W) referring to the writer’s personal desire for a positive future outcome for many families.

These same components were used more successfully by other writers in their introductions and conclusions. For example, one North American writer effectively introduced personal experience in the

introduction as the basis to support the same argument in favor of elderly living with family. Therefore, it is safe to say that it was not the choice of the particular combinations of components that led to a low evaluation but rather the lack of development of these components (one short sentence for each). In the words of the same evaluator quoted above: “The longer paragraphs, with more than one or two predictable sentences, generally held my interest better than the formulaic short paragraphs” (evaluator 2).

Sample Essay 1. Exp1-5; Introduction: Position + Context + Announcement; Conclusion: Summary + Position (implied) + Writer-based extension

^(P)I think that old people should live with their family members. ^(C)Actually, I have experienced life with my grandmother. ^(A)Based on this fact, I want to write this thesis.

Living with old people has two important advantages. First, when old people get serious sick, their family members can support and help them. If old people are alone, they will not be able to have a care when they get serious sick. This is very important fact, and this is a matter of life and death. For example, my family live with my grandmother now, and the other day my grandmother fell down suddenly. If she was alone, she may lost her life. However, my father noticed this accident immediately, he helped her. Thus, my grandmother narrowly escape death. Moreover, when old people get a sick, their family member can support them mentally. Mental support is rather important, and if old people are alone, they can't feel their relief. Now, my grandmother is bed ridden, but our conversation seems to play a important role in her health.

Secondly, if the family has a child, the child can have various experiences through living with old people who are different generation people. Old people have experienced various accidents and events, they can tell their grandchild it. The child can learn from grandparents' story. For example, I have heard various interesting stories from my grandmother. I can imagine the old days from it. When I was a child, I looked forward to hearing these stories. Furthermore, old people have different sense of values from the grandchild. Living with people who have different sense of values is valuable experience for each, that is, grandchild and grandparents. Through living with my grandmother, I can learn kindness for different generation.

It is true that living with old people have some difficulties. For example, my acquaintance often complain about living with his grandparent. He says that they young generation people can't understand old people any more. However, I think that they can understand each other someday. Living with old people is a big chance that we can understand people who have different sense of values.

^{(Sum with P(imp))}Through living old people, their family members can grow up in many aspect. ^(Ext-W)I hope that many families accept their grandparents, and they lead a full life.

In contrast to the above essay, the following essay by an Experienced Group 2 writer (Exp2-7) appears to have benefited from a relatively stronger introduction and conclusion. The content scores for this essay were rather low (ranging from 4.25 to 4.5 out of 7), though the structure and language use scores were higher (5 to 5.5), and the overall score was 5.25, which was the second highest score for the group. One of the two reviewers was much more critical of this essay than the other one, but nevertheless described a strength of the essay as follows: “The introduction and conclusion do help the reader see the essay as a unified whole” (evaluator 1).

Sample Essay 2. Exp2-7; Introduction: Position + Preview; Conclusion: Marker + Position + Summary

^(P)Early foreign language education for elementary school children has a lot of advantages especially for their listening and speaking skills. ^(Prev)Elementary school children, who are actively developing abilities to listen and imitate sounds in their developing process can be trained their listening and speaking skills of foreign language effectively by native speakers.

In elementary school class, students don't need to learn grammar or writing sentences, but should learn and use greetings or some simple phrases with classmates or teachers in order to be familiar with the sound of the foreign language. Elementary school children are pleased to imitate sounds more than junior high school students who are embarrassed to imitate the sound of foreign language and have accent of their own mother tongue. The younger they are, the more they like to imitate sounds. They tend to try to speak foreign language as if they are native speakers. The nature of children causes them to listen the foreign language with concentration and also enables them to develop listening skills. Therefore, such learning realizes development of tongue and ears of elementary school children for the foreign language.

Moreover, such listening and speaking trainings lead [to] children's interest in the language, because this training is not so much the kind of knowledge learnings with text book and exercise drill book as enjoyable play with friends and teachers. Many children would be interested in study of the language and even culture of the people who speak the language. It makes easier to study the language in following study stage, such as grammar, reading or writing.

^(Mkr)Therefore, ^(P)people who arrange education programs should realize the great advantages to start early foreign language education for elementary school children. ^(Sum)It is important to learn and familiar with the sound of the foreign language while their abilities to listen and imitate are actively developed, besides enjoyable speaking of the language and broadened interest in the language study is helpful to study the language in following study in junior high school.

How do the introduction and conclusion of the essay specifically contribute to its quality? First, they are longer than those in the preceding essay. The introduction is close to the average number of words and components for the group (52 words vs. 53.9 average for Exp2; 2 components vs. 2.4 average), and the conclusion is much longer than the average (71 words vs. 45.2 average; three components vs. 2.7 average). Second, relatively long, complex sentences express these components in both parts. In the introduction, the Position in favor of foreign language education is elaborated by specifying “listening and speaking skills,” and the Preview refers to specific supporting reasons and a suggestion that native speakers could be effective in teaching foreign language to children. Similarly, in the conclusion, the Position and Summary include specific contents of the gist of the argument. Third, even though there is both a Preview and a Summary, they do not create a feeling of redundancy. Although one key point was mentioned in both the Preview and Summary (“abilities to listen and imitate” being “actively developed” by young learners), the emphasis otherwise differs. In the introduction Preview, the emphasis is on teaching in effective ways, and in the conclusion Summary, it shifts to stressing benefits for the learner (i.e., enjoyment, interest, and productive future study).

Even though the introduction and conclusion of the essay appear to work together well to frame the essay, as pointed out by the reviewer above, one weakness should be noted. The introduction paragraph ends with a reference to children being “trained...effectively by native speakers.” This could mislead the reader into thinking that the role of native-speaking teachers will be a main focus in the essay, which it is not. In fact, there is no direct reference to native-speaking teachers in the rest of the essay, although there is mention of children enjoying imitation of sounds and trying to speak “as if they are native speakers,” which could imply a very indirect reference to native-speaking teachers. This case illustrates the problem of a potential gap between the introduction and the rest of the essay. In our study, this kind of gap often appeared when writers provided only a partial Preview of one or two points in the introduction, whereas other key points developed in the essay were not mentioned in the Preview.

Based on our findings in this and the preceding sections, it is clear that learning to write effective introductions and conclusions is a complex process. In the final section, we would like to suggest some ways to apply these findings.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this last section, we present seven practical implications for the classroom based on the findings of this study. Let us look at each of these interrelated suggestions in turn.

1. *Make separate paragraphs for introduction and conclusion:* Writers can distinguish clearly between the opening, body, and concluding parts of an essay by learning to create separate introduction and conclusion paragraphs. This is an important step for novice English writers to acquire a basic schema for essay organization.
2. *Learn typical patterns:* Writers can be introduced to typical patterns of components for introductions and conclusions. For introductions, these would include Context + Position + Preview. For conclusions, they involve Conclusion Marker + Position + Summary. These standard components can prove useful for developing writers to orient their readers and make it easy to follow the argument through to the end of the essay. At the same time, we would like to point out that the use of such formulaic introductions and conclusions should not be considered an end point, but rather a step on the way to more effective writing that is individually designed to reach particular audiences in local contexts (see Suggestion 7 below).
3. *Write longer introductions and conclusions:* Writers should be encouraged to expand their introductions and conclusions. As we have seen, the best way to do this does not seem to be to add more components. Rather than employing four or five short, simple components, it appears that extending and elaborating two or three longer components is more effective.
4. *Give Context at beginning of introduction:* Writers can connect with their readers by starting with Context the readers can relate to. Drawing on various theories of argumentation, Sato (2014) convincingly showed that starting an argumentation essay with “a *shared context*” or “*common starting points*” between reader and writer (p. 9, italics in original) is usually the most persuasive way to lead the reader to accept the writer’s viewpoint in both English and Japanese. Thus, it would seem

that starting an introduction with Context to establish shared understanding may be the most effective strategy for beginning an argumentation essay in any language. (A possible exception might be an argumentation essay test format that requires the writer to take a position for or against and support it convincingly within a short time period.)

5. *Maintain coherence between introduction, body, and conclusion:* In order to develop their control (writer agency) over the quality of the essay, writers need to learn to connect the parts of their essays to each other smoothly. To do this, there should not be any gaps in meaning between the introduction and body, or between the body and conclusion. In addition, it would be ideal to establish some relation between the introduction and conclusion.
6. *Avoid too much redundancy:* Writers should take care to eliminate too much repetition between the introduction and conclusion. In particular, if there is a Preview in the introduction and a Summary in the conclusion, they should contain different wording. It might also be beneficial to make them different in terms of their level of specificity. For example, a general Preview of the gist of the position could go well with a specific Summary of all the main points that support it.
7. *Move beyond formulaic patterns:* As they become more advanced, writers could be encouraged to experiment with unpredictable, non-formulaic patterns to enhance the quality of their writing. For introductions, this could involve adding a Focus component to clarify the terms and limits of the argument, as necessary, depending on what the writer assumes the imagined readers think about the topic. Similarly, in conclusions, it would include adding a Concession or an Extension, either text-based or writer-based. A Text-based Extension could be a future implication, broader perspective (e.g., prediction or recommendation), or suggested results or consequences (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). A Writer-based Extension could include what the writer has personally learned in the process of writing (Davis & Liss, 2006).

As we have seen in this paper, the relations between introductions, conclusions, and the essays they begin and end are complex. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ability to write successful introductions and conclusions takes a long time to develop. In fact, as pointed out by Kellogg (2011) and others, professional writing expertise takes at least 20 years to achieve and never stops growing as long as we keep writing. As writing teachers and writers ourselves, we can keep trying to find better ways for writers to connect to their audience effectively, especially in introductions and conclusions, which stand out most memorably for our readers and are probably the most essential parts of every written text.

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