

INTRODUCTIONS

WHAT IS AN INTRODUCTION?

Introductions are the first section in a piece of writing. They introduce the subject and focus of your writing to the reader. In addition to setting the stage for what's to come, good introductions successfully hook their readers, or capture the reader's attention, by offering an intriguing or thought-provoking first impression. Introductions typically include a thesis statement, usually located in the last sentence of the introduction, before the main body of the writing begins.

HOW TO WRITE AN INTRODUCTION

1. Write an interesting hook, or attention-grabbing device

Hooks are designed to entice and intrigue the reader about your topic. They are attention-grabbing devices and are usually quite short. They can take the form of a provocative statement about the issue; a striking fact or correlation; an anecdote, story, or example; a specific question to be answered in the essay; or something that fascinates you about your subject.

Consider the following questions:

- What are some enticing ways to orient your paper and your reader?
- What questions could you ask to intrigue your reader?
- What is the most interesting piece of information about your subject?
- How would you approach this topic with a friend or loved one?

2. Start with the bigger picture/including necessary context

Providing context gives your reader important information they need to fully understand the subject or main argument of your paper. It is good practice to assume your reader is not as knowledgeable about your topic as you are; context is there to fill the reader in. You can provide context by explaining why the topic requires a response, explaining the historical background for the issue, or setting up the conclusion or outcomes.

Consider the following questions:

- What is the most obvious issue that relates to your subject?
- Is there an overarching question you could ask?
- What is the main subject/topic of your paper?
- What is the historical, social, or cultural context that informs this topic or impacts the issue?

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3. Include your thesis statement in your introduction

The thesis statement is the main idea/argument or the central focus of your paper. Establishing a thesis statement in your introduction helps the reader understand exactly what they will get out of your paper and helps both the writer and reader follow a logical argument through your body paragraphs.

A strong thesis statement should do the following:

- Anticipate the major argument of the essay
- Include further proof or development
- Be limited to the scope of the essay

See also The Writing Center's Thesis Statement handout.

COMMON PITFALLS FOR WRITERS STRUGGLING WITH INTRODUCTIONS

Not including thesis statement/claim

Thesis statements function like a compass in your essay. They provide the writer with direction and inform the reader of the point of the writing. Be sure to develop and include a thesis statement in your introduction, especially if you wish to write a logical and organized piece.

Failing to introduce the topic /provide relevant background information

Be careful not to make assumptions about your reader's prior knowledge on your topic. You must not assume your reader is as knowledgeable as you are. Instead, write to a reader who knows little or nothing about the subject.

Including too much too soon / writing a miniature version of your piece as the intro

Some writers put too many details in their introductions, leaving nothing left to say in the body of their essays. Remember that you have the rest of your essay to go into detail. Save the good stuff for the body paragraphs!

Beginning in a mundane or cliché way

Refrain from using common or overly general introduction lines, which can be boring or off-putting to your reader. Ex.: "Since the beginning of time..." or "Everybody who's anybody knows..."

Confusing or unrelated ideas in the introduction

Stay on topic from the beginning - introductions are no place for ideas that are not related to the ideas coming in the rest of the paper.

Not returning to your introduction during revision

Often, the introduction is the first part of the paper written. When written first, some writers may find their introductions do not match the caliber of the rest of the finished paper. If you write your introduction first, be sure to return to it after you finish writing your paper. Alternatively, you can write your introduction last!