



Introductions

What is an introduction?

The introduction, often the first paragraph/first couple of paragraphs, engages the reader and sets up the rest of the essay. Effective introductions present the topic, define terms, provide the reader with context, and conclude with the thesis statement. Essentially, introductions make the reader want to keep reading! Writers often leave the final drafting of the introduction for last since the essay's focus may shift and change throughout the writing process.

Good introductions usually...

- Focus the reader's attention on the essay's topic
- Specify what the essay's topic is
- Arouse the reader's curiosity in the topic
- Provide the thesis statement/position of the argument

What information does the introduction need to have?

- **Who** the paper is about
- **What** the paper is about
- **Where** the topic takes place
- **When** the idea(s) occurred
- **How** the event(s), technique(s), idea(s) transpired
- **Significance** of the topic

Ways to Write an Introduction

The Funnel

The funnel introduction begins with a statement or question about the subject—a hook that engages and interests the reader. Then, it includes one or more sentences that clarify and narrow the subject. Finally, using the last sentences as a bridge, the funnel introduction ends with the thesis statement. Each sentence takes the reader one step closer to the specific focus of the essay, moving the reader from general to specific. For example:

The declaration of Independence is so widely regarded as a statement of American ideals that its origins in practical politics tend to be forgotten. Thomas Jefferson's draft was intensely debated and then revised in the Continental Congress. Jefferson was disappointed with the result. However, a close reading of both the historical context and the revisions themselves indicates that the congress improved the document for its intended purpose.
-Ann Weiss (student), "The Editing of the Declaration of Independence"

Open with an Intriguing Statement

Nobody dies like Stalin did. He didn't just die, he took the world with him.
-Andrei Codrescu, "Stalin"

Open with an Anecdote

Canada is pink. I knew from the map I owned when I was six. On it, New York was green and brown, which was true as far as I could see, so there was no reason to distrust the mapmaker's portrayal of Canada. When my parents took me across the border, and we entered the immigration booth, I looked excitedly for the pink earth. Slowly it dawned on me: this foreign, "different" place was not so different. I discovered that the world in my head and the world at my feet were not the same.
-Robert Ornstein, *Human Nature*

Open with a Question that Your Essay Will Answer

Why are Americans terrified of using nuclear power as a source of energy? People are misinformed or not informed at all, about all its benefits and safety. If Americans would take the time to learn what nuclear power offers, their apprehension and fear might be transformed into hope.

Open with an Example

Libby Smith knows what it is like to be a victim of gay bashing. First, there were the harassing telephone calls to her home. Then, one evening last March as she went to get her book bag out of a locker at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, she was attacked by two men.
-Mary Crystal Cage, "Gay Bashing on Campus"

Open with a Quotation that Leads to the Thesis

"It is difficult to speak adequately or justly of London," wrote Henry James in 1881. "It is not a pleasant place; it is not agreeable, or cheerful, or easy, or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent." Were he alive today, James, a connoisseur of cities, might easily say the same thing about New York or Paris or Tokyo, for the great city is one of the paradoxes of history. In countless different ways, it has almost always been an unpleasant, disagreeable, cheerless, uneasy, and reproachful place; in the end, it can only be described as magnificent.
-*Time*



Openings to Avoid

A Vague Generality or Truth

Don't extend your reach too wide with a phrase like "Throughout human history" or "Since the beginning of time."

A Flat Announcement

Don't start with "The purpose of this essay" or "In this essay, I will." You can engage the reader without naming the purpose in the first sentence.

A Reference to the Essay's Title

Don't refer to your title in the first sentence of the essay. The title should speak for itself.

According to Webster...

Don't start by citing the dictionary definition. A definition can be an effective springboard to an essay, but this kind of lead has become dull because it is overused.

An Apology

Don't fault your opinion or your knowledge with "I'm not sure if I am right" or "I am not an expert." Your reader needs to trust you as a writer and believe what you have to say.

