

Introductions

Introductions are, in many ways, the most social part of any written document. They ease the reader from his or her own immediate surroundings into the “space” of your analysis. Introductions are contracts you make with your readers; in it, you communicate to them what they can expect from the rest of your text. The introduction sets the tone and style of your argument, and gives your readers an idea of your ultimate reasons for writing and what you hope to accomplish through the document. A good introduction will include an explicit thesis statement that will capture the point of your document and make your readers want to continue reading.

Some tips for creating effective introductions:

- Use an attention-grabber, such as an interesting quotation, a paradox, a question, or an anecdote. Attention-grabbers are especially useful for getting your reader interested in your topic by establishing its relevance.
- Write the introduction last. Often, we aren’t sure where we are going to end up when we begin a paper, but by the end of the initial writing process, have formulated a solid argument. It is useful at this point to write an introduction that matches the body of your paper.
- Provide your readers with any background information or definition of terms that they will need to understand the body of your paper.
- Make sure your thesis statement is clearly stated within the introduction. In many, but not all, cases, the thesis statement comes at the end of the introduction.

What to avoid when creating an introduction:

- Vague language or ideas. This prevents your readers from getting a good idea of where your paper is headed, and thus does not capture their interest.
- Beginning with a dictionary definition. The dictionary definition is usually very general and does not take into account the context of your discipline, course, or topic, and thus does not work to move your argument forward. Instead, develop your own definition of the term within your specific context using both primary and secondary sources.
- Beginning too broadly. Don’t start your paper with some sweeping statement about your general topic since the beginning of time. This kind of introduction is usually very general and doesn’t connect effectively to your thesis statement.

