



The Introduction

The introduction is where you make your first impression as a writer, and first impressions tend to stick with the reader. An incomplete or poorly crafted intro will be difficult for the paper to overcome. This is why many experienced writers spend as much time on the intro as they do on the rest of the essay. Most introductions are rewritten several times, often after the rest of the essay has been finished. It will be satisfying to draft a complete intro draft (and you may be asked to do so for an assignment), but keep in mind that you will return to the intro repeatedly.

An effective introductory paragraph should accomplish three main tasks:

1. Introduce the purpose of the essay and any important ideas or concepts

Your introduction needs to set up the context for your discussion – it needs to give your readers a snapshot of the paper to follow by explaining (in brief) why your topic or subject is worth writing about. You will need to introduce the main “players” in your essay, such as: the perspectives you will compare/contrast; the main theory, position, or principle you will explicate; the text(s) comprising the main analysis of your essay; your research question(s); etc. Your goal is not to go into great detail or depth in the introduction about your selected texts or topic, but more to set up the main concepts and contexts that you will use to develop your argument in the body of the paper (so your readers will be familiar with these ideas/texts/answers when you return to them later).

2. Capture the reader’s interest

The introduction should interest the reader in the rest of the essay. It needs to entice the reader to continue reading and convince her or him that something interesting is going to happen in the rest of the paper. You do not need to try to be humorous or entertaining to capture the reader’s attention; instead, readers are compelled to move beyond the introduction when you have established the field of discourse for your essay and your own insight, angle, or interpretation. Try to make your topic and argument more relevant and significant as a way to excite your reader’s interest and imagination.

3. Provide a platform for your thesis

The most reliable or easily identifiable place for your thesis is usually at or near the end of your introductory paragraph (even in longer researched essays, your thesis should not be buried in the middle of a paragraph). Do not open your paper with the thesis. The introduction needs to prepare for the thesis by providing an appropriate “platform” for the main argument you are making. The platform will consist of your responses to #1 above (overview of purpose and concepts), and other important points that help you establish the context for your argument. An essay with a strong intro makes clear and sensible connections between each sentence of the platform, as it moves logically towards the thesis at the end.

Other helpful tips for writing engaging, persuasive, and effective introductions

- Brainstorm before you start writing to make sure you have a strong topic for your paper. Remember: a topic is the general idea or focus of your essay but it is NOT the thesis statement.



- Spend time on your opener: the first sentence of your intro. Try to capture your reader's interest from the very start of the paper. This is easier said than done perhaps, but practice writing openers that both sound good (as well-crafted sentences) and say something compelling to help set up your thesis.
- Choose the right length for the introduction. For shorter essays (under 10 pages), you should plan to have just one introductory paragraph; for longer researched essays, you may need multiple introductory paragraphs.
- Craft a full-bodied or more complete introduction. Intros that are only a few sentences can point to problems in the paper; readers might think you are short on ideas, or your intro might need clarification on points, more context, or a stronger platform. You do not need to summarize every claim and idea you intend to explore in your essay in the intro, but your intro needs to explain your purpose, context, focus, and prepare for your thesis.
- Do not fear giving away your answer. Some writers worry that if they disclose their main argument in the intro then there is no point to the rest of the essay. Quite the opposite is true: readers want to see how you will support and develop your argument.
- Write in straightforward, clear prose. Avoid the use of slang and colloquialism as much as possible. If you need to use complex diction or terminology in your introduction, be sure you explain these concepts (offer a short definition of the word you are using).