

Writing Introductions

An introduction is like...

- **A map for your paper.** It tells the reader where you will be going in your paper and how you will get there.
- **A reverse conclusion.** While conclusions get your readers to consider the larger implications, introductions try to bring in your readers to your specific point.
- **A picture frame.** It sets the limits of what your paper will discuss.
- **A funnel.** It can start out somewhere wide or general to collect your readers, then narrows or funnels the reader down to your position.
- **A brief explanation** of their conversation that a group of people who are already talking might give you if you joined in late.
- **A set of blueprints.** It tells the contractor how the building or paper is designed. It sets the main structural points of the essay, but does not explain how it is decorated.
- **A movie trailer.** Just like a movie trailer for a good movie, the introduction sets up the context of how the essay is going to be written, but it does not “spoil” the whole paper.
- **The bread of a really good sandwich.** It is the first thing you “bite” into when you read a paper, and it holds all of the ingredients (body paragraphs) together.
- **The string holding together a beaded necklace.** It holds all the other beads together and will eventually connect back to the conclusion.

Introductions usually answer the following questions...

- ✓ What is your topic/focus?
- ✓ Why is your topic interesting, important, or necessary to discuss?
- ✓ What sort of background information do your readers need to know?
- ✓ Is this a controversial topic, and if so, what has already been said about it?
- ✓ What is your purpose in writing this piece? Are you going to take a position? Are you going to explore a question?

What types of things should you avoid in introductions?

- ✗ Topics or main ideas that you will not cover in your paper
- ✗ Too many ideas that make your thesis indistinct
- ✗ Excessive background that may be obvious, or general information that is irrelevant to your point.
- ✗ Overly general or obvious statements such as:
 - “Since the beginning of time...”
 - “Media is everywhere...”
 - “Webster’s Dictionary defines socialism as...”
- ✗ Specific points that need more explanation and should be covered in body paragraph

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Introductions: Fact or Myth?

Introductions can only be one paragraph.

FACT MYTH

You should write an introduction that is proportionate to the complexity of your essay. A short paper (3-5 pages) might contain an introduction from half to three-quarters of a page or about four to five sentences. A long paper (such as a 15-20+ page paper) might need several paragraphs or pages to adequately introduce the topic.

Good introductions need a “hook.”

FACT MYTH

Getting your reader’s attention in a variety of ways is an effective introductory tool. However, informing your readers of the direction of your paper is more important than trying to be funny or shocking. Consider approaches beyond quoting someone or asking a question to hook your audience. Use your essay’s content to interest the reader.

You should write your introduction first to steer your paper. FACT MYTH

You can write your introduction whenever you want! You may have to experiment to find out what works best for you; some people like writing their introduction first, while some wait until their papers are completely finished to write an intro. Try a few different approaches until you learn how you write best.

The introduction should provide background to your audience. FACT MYTH

You should consider your audience in your introduction and provide enough information for them to develop a viewpoint from which to understand your topic. Is your reader familiar with the subject of your paper? What do they already know? Are you writing for an audience outside of the field?

The thesis should always be the introduction’s last sentence. FACT MYTH

Typically, a thesis statement can be the concluding statement of the introductory paragraph – many instructors and readers will look there first. However, once you know how a thesis works, you can become more creative with how you position your main point. Some essays might not have a single thesis statement, but a controlling argument still governs the direction of the paper.