

Introductions

Do's:

- In your introduction, **attract the reader's attention** - get him/her interested in reading the paper
- Provide necessary or helpful **background information** about the topic - create a context or "set the stage" for the essay so a reader can understand or appreciate your main point
- Don't start the essay "mid discussion" with no context
- Give the reader a **sense of why** you're writing about this particular subject
- State the **core idea (thesis)** of the essay
- Since all the writing in this course is reading-based, **introduce the text and the author** you're writing about in the introductory paragraph

Don'ts:

- **Avoid The Generic:** (an introduction that could be stuck onto any essay about any subject) "In this modern, complex world, we all face many daily problems"
- **Avoid The Mechanical:** "In this essay, I am going to discuss..." (Note: This approach is not favored in most humanities courses, but may be encouraged in business or science courses)
- **Avoid Clichés:** Avoid worn out over-used phrases like "According to the dictionary..." and "Don't judge a book by its cover." Use language that is fresh, original and engaging.

The Purpose of the First Paragraph of Any Paper

- 1) To attract the reader's attention - get him/her interested in reading the paper.
- 2) To provide necessary or helpful background information about the topic - to create a context or "set the stage" for the essay so a reader can understand or appreciate your main point.
- 3) To give the reader a sense of why you're writing about this particular subject.
- 4) To state the core idea (thesis) of the essay. Some people also like to indicate the main points of the paper, but this step is optional.

Engaging Your Reader

While most body paragraphs move from general topic sentences to more specific supporting details, introductions often capture their readers' attention by beginning with concrete details. Some ways to do this include:

- 1) Relating a short, illustrative anecdote or example
- 2) Connecting your topic to a familiar experience the reader is likely to have had or a cultural reference they are likely to have shared
- 3) Posing a provocative question, one that will get your reader thinking
- 4) Including a short direct quote that illuminates the topic (be sure to give full names of writers, experts, and text titles when you first reference them)
- 5) Surprising your reader with striking facts or statistics
- 6) Defining key terms (Avoid using the dictionary approach, "According to *Webster's*..." which is overused)
- 7) Providing background information and/or history on the topic
- 8) Stating a problem that will be analyzed or solved

Remember that there is no single all-purpose formula for successful introductions. You can use any strategy that you wish as long as you prepare the reader fully for what follows in the body of the paper.

Warming up vs. Writing an Introduction

While an introduction is the first thing we read in an essay, it is not necessarily the first thing you will write. Many student writers get stuck when they try to write the "perfect" introduction first. You need to know what your paper is going to say before you can introduce it to your readers.

The first thing you write in a draft might be simply "warming up" to the topic, which is fine for a draft, but does not do much for a larger group of readers. Often, students write first drafts that have the makings of great introductions and thesis statements at the very end of the draft because that's when the writer finally figures out what she or he wants to say. The trick is to recognize this phenomenon in your own writing, and to revise the paper so that it begins with and focuses on presenting the point you wrote your way into.

Like your thesis statement, the introduction may be one of the last aspects of the paper that you polish up once you have a solid draft that says what you want it to say. Try skipping the introduction at first: write whatever you need to write initially to get yourself into the heart of the paper, and assume you'll go back and polish the introduction once you've produced the paper that you will be introducing. You'll then find writing the introduction a lot less grueling.

Questions to Ask Yourself When Trying to Write an Introduction

- 1) Why am I writing about this subject?
- 2) What am I writing in response to? (What have I experienced or read that leads me to want to address this subject?)
- 3) How does my main point relate to anything going on in the world?
- 4) Do I need to explain why I think this subject is significant?
- 5) Do I need to supply any background information (including information about myself)?
- 6) Can I appeal to the reader's self interest?

Types of Introductions to Avoid

- **Avoid The Generic** (an introduction that could be stuck onto any essay about any subject) "In this modern, complex world, we all face many daily problems"
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Moving Smoothly into Your Thesis

As with any paragraph, you want to be sure that each sentence follows logically from the last, and that taken together, all of your sentences build up to the main point of your introduction: your thesis. Transitioning strategies that you use to build bridges between ideas in the rest of your essay (making use of the given-new principle, repeating key words, inserting transition words) are also suitable for your introduction.

Other Introduction Issues

Introductions are not always just one paragraph long. Longer, more complex papers might require introductory sections since you will need to explain more in order to lead up to your main point. In a paper under 10 pages long, the introduction usually should not exceed one page.

Although an introduction may be more than one paragraph long, it generally won't start to develop or give support to the paper's main point because that's what the body of the paper is for. An introduction leads up to the main point whereas the body of the paper develops and supports the main point.

Sample Introductions

*"Power never concedes anything without a demand.
It never has and it never will." --Frederick Douglass*

In solving race problems, we must make demands as Douglass states, but we can't do that until we see the problems. I mean really *see* them. That is the hard part. Mustering the will to solve them is difficult but less so. Least difficult is designing the mechanics of solutions. All of us look. Few of us *see*. Or want to see, trained lovingly as we are in the more genteel, commonplace, everyday bigotries. The blindness is pretty much universal. We've all been acclimated to static expectation and some level of socially acceptable prejudice.

Sometimes I wonder why there are so many teenage pregnancies, especially now when sex education starts early in grammar school and Planned Parenthood agencies are available for birth control information. Each year one million teenagers become pregnant; nine out of ten teenage mothers keep their babies; girls aged 14-17 form the only group of women in which birth rates has not declined; two thirds of teenage pregnancies are unintended. Even though our schools offer sex education programs, and public agencies dispense birth control education, there are many deeper reasons why these children are becoming pregnant.

Have you ever tried fitting a square peg into a round hole? It's almost impossible. And that's how I often felt about my lifestyle - it didn't comply with that which was "American." It didn't fit. You see, I was raised as a whole-hearted German: I thought German, I spoke German, I felt German. It has taken me quite a few years to recognize what the effects of my upbringing have been, and to integrate the two diverse cultural backgrounds, American and German, into one, instead of feeling that they were two separate conflicting parts. But until I was able to do that, I had to deal with the psychological problems that came up because I was "different."