

Writing Introductions



at The Academic Resource Center

508-588-9100 x1801

writingcenter@massasoit.mass.edu

Introductions are an opportunity to grab the attention of your reader and draw them into your subject and your perspective. An introduction usually contains a thesis (your guiding argument or idea) and communicates what your reader will know or understand after reading the essay.

Ways to Structure Your Introduction

Funnel

One of the simplest and most effective introductions, the funnel is useful for gradually building to your essay's central idea (the thesis). First, begin by offering a broad, general statement about the subject. Next, begin to offer more specific background detail related to your topic. Finally, transition into your thesis statement and establish what the bulk of your paper will be about. Here is an example:

In the early 1960s, the civil rights movement in America was beginning to make meaningful strides. Particularly in the African American community, black leaders were drawing massive crowds at rallies designed to raise awareness about social inequality. Two such leaders, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., fought ardently for black rights. Both X and King forever changed the social landscape of America by ensuring equal protection, under the law, for all.

Contrast

While not as common as the funnel, this introduction draws contrasts early in your paper as a helpful tool to establish your larger point. This works by first elaborating on a commonly held opinion and then presenting your thesis as the opposite of that opinion. Here is an example:

Many students struggle to write papers for a plethora of reasons. Chief among them is the fact that these students skip nearly any and all prewriting steps, and instead, seek to start writing their paper immediately upon settling down in front of a computer. However, writing can be much easier if students begin to understand the importance of prewriting steps to the writing process. By brainstorming, outlining, and drawing out idea maps before they begin to write in earnest, students will discover that writing is not as difficult as they thought, and in fact, may even be enjoyable.

Writing Introductions, Cont'd

Additional Strategies

Give background on your subject. Provide its history or summarize the current debate surrounding it.

Use a definition, a quotation, or an anecdote to lead into your topic.

Write about someone (a critic, an expert, a person involved in your subject) who holds an opinion on the topic.

Report a fact, statistic, or even a commonly held opinion on your topic that warrants additional explanation.

Drafting Tips

Write your introduction last.

Sometimes it's easier to focus and write down all your evidence before writing your introduction.

Write a very simple introduction, then expand on it later.

Some people feel they must write an introduction before writing the body paragraphs. If you are one of those people, try writing a quick and simple intro and then move on to the main points of the essay. When you've finished, return to the introduction and revise it so that it reflects the content of the rest of your essay.

Be confident.

Have a strong and clear voice in your writing and use precise language. Avoid phrases like "I don't know much about the subject, but..." or words like "perhaps, seems, maybe, etc." Keep your essay focused on your ideas and your topic and be confident in both your knowledge and your writing.

Avoid generalities.

While it is useful to start an introduction with a broad thought that is funneled into a more specific idea, try not to make that broad thought *too* broad. Phrases like "Throughout human history," "In today's world," or "All women believe" set you up for trouble. Whatever statements that followed such grandiose generalities are hard to prove and would likely be incorrect.
