

Writing Introductions

Tips and Techniques

What is the goal here?

Every story has to start somewhere. Your introduction is the start of your paper and has some specific goals:

- * To get readers interested
- * To prepare them for what they are about to read
- * To clearly state the function of the writing

This last item is called your “thesis statement.”

So the job of your introduction is:

- * To “hook” the reader and make them want to keep reading
- * To explain what you will be covering
- * To clarify the general point of the work

Technique 1: Tell a story

For this type of intro we try to grab the reader with a brief story, one they can connect with, or that gets their attention.

Often these work best when they are thrilling, or show a human aspect of the writer or topic. The story introduction is all about creating a human connection

Sample Story Introduction

for a paper about animal emotions

“It was a thrill to see a dolphin’s fin cutting through the pool, moving gracefully and ever so fast. As it approached, I could only gasp in amazement before I realized it wasn’t turning away. It was coming right for me. Before I could move, it hit me like a freight train, knocking me backwards and under the water. As I surfaced, the dolphin did too, erupting into a cackling noise that was clearly its hysterical laughter. This dolphin had a real sense of humor. Though we sometimes think of them as very different than us, our fellow mammals share some very human characteristics, and even emotions. While interpreting these apparent feelings can be difficult, one thing has become clear: our fellow mammals have a rich and compelling emotional life.”

Technique 2: Respond to a quote

This intro uses a quote from an important thinker, writer, or expert to begin. The writer then responds to the quote as a way to transition into the material about which they are writing.

Sample quote introduction for a paper about emotional maturity

“All the world is a stage,
and all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts”

Shakespeare

As You Like It, Act II, Sc. 7

As we grow and age our identity does as well. We are all developing emotionally alongside our physical growth. Our reaction to the same stimulus changes depending on how old we are. While Shakespeare knew this was true for actors, scientists have shown that we all “play many parts” in life as we grow and mature. It has become increasingly clear that a combination of factors affect how we mature and express emotion.

Technique 3: Pose a Problem

Here the writer explains a problem or issue, leading up to a compelling question that is the doorway into the paper. Here, the bulk of the paper is about answering the question.

Sample problem introduction for a paper about alternate energy

Just a look at the news can tell us that our world is rapidly changing. From melting polar ice to raging wildfires, from pollution to pandemics it can even seem as if the the earth is doing it's best to erase all life. Scientists have pointed to global climate change as the cause for may of these disasters, but there is a bigger issue at hand for us as a species: what can we do to turn things around? Experts worldwide have shared opinions, and though there are disagreements, it is becoming increasingly clear that humans need to find new energy solutions.

Technique 4: Ask a compelling question

This is similar to the problem introduction. Rather than laying out the details of a difficult issue, the question introduction can be more direct. It works best when the question is a very human one, something most of us think about.

Sample question introduction for a paper about hobbies

“Mom, I’m bored!” How many times did you say it when you were small, or even recently? Humans crave novelty, new experiences and activities that stimulate their minds and bodies. But how do we find new and interesting things to do? The search for a new hobby and development of the skills associated with it are not just a way to stave off boredom, they can improve our physical and mental health as well.

A word on the thesis statement

The goal of the thesis statement is to make the topic clear, and to suggest the thrust of your writing.

It does not need to be a total summation of the idea.

It does need to clearly tell the reader what the paper is about, and can suggest your point of view.

Sample thesis statements

Weak: “This paper is about football. It will tell you everything you need to know about the sport.”

Here the writer makes the topic clear, but is vague about what she might say.

Better: “Football is important to many Americans who have come to see it as more than a game; it has become a metaphor for their entire worldview”

Here the writer makes the topic clear, and goes on to show she will be examining the connections between the game and society

Remember to think about:

- * Who is my audience?
- * What will keep them interested?
- * Am I maintaining a clear thesis?
- * Have I provided enough detail to be clear?