

The Art of the Introduction

The purpose of an introduction is to set up the ideas in your paper. An introduction paragraph provides the initial impression of your argument, showcases your writing style and voice, and establishes the overall quality of your work to your readers.

Your introduction should captivate your audience's interest and attention and should serve as a preview for your paper. Think of the introduction and conclusion paragraphs as "bookends" that hold together your paper's main ideas, or body paragraphs.

All introductions should convey **the content**, **the style**, and **the organization** for the rest of your paper.

The Content

Each essay genre has its own set of content.

- ❖ *Research paper/argumentative paper*: 1) background information on your topic/context; 2) overview of your paper's organization; 3) thesis statement
- ❖ *Literary analysis paper*: 1) any relevant background information; 2) author(s) and title of text(s); 3) overview of your paper's organization; 4) thesis statement
- ❖ *Narrative paper*: 1) setting (time and place); 2) narrative hook; 3) emphasis on voice; 4) no thesis statement

The Organization

The introduction paragraph's logical organization is necessary in setting up your paper's argument.

Begin with a general overview of the topic and then become more specific, narrowing to the thesis statement (typically the last sentence in the introduction).

The Style

Choosing a style for your introduction paragraph will help you avoid repetition of similar ideas and will help keep your material new and fresh. The style of the introduction will reflect your writer's voice and will set the tone for your paper.

There are different kinds of styles to choose when composing an introduction:

- ❖ Analogy
- ❖ Allusion
- ❖ Anecdote/Narration
- ❖ Description
- ❖ Definition
- ❖ Example/Statistic

Analogous Introductions make a comparison that will catch your reader’s attention and will introduce your paper topic.

Imagine that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is presented with a series of studies testing the effectiveness of a new drug. There are some laboratory tests that produce fairly consistent positive effects, but the drug does not always work as expected and no attempt has been made to discover why. Most of the clinical tests are negative; there are also a few weak positive results and a few results suggesting that the drug is less effective than a placebo. Obviously the FDA would reject this application, yet the widely accepted evidence that watching television violence causes aggression is no more adequate.

Jonathan L. Freedman, “Violence in the Mass Media and Violence in Society: The Link is Unproven,” from *The Aims of Argument*

Allusion Introductions make a reference to another literary work, person, or event.

Four decades ago Betty Friedan, in her groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*, wrote about women who suffer—a problem that had no name. They were sick and tired of being sick and tired of having no identity to call their own: The problem is always being the children’s mommy, or the minister’s wife, and never being myself. One woman described her situation as living in a—comfortable concentration camp.

There’s a new problem without a name now and it’s a mare of another color. Women are complaining about work and writing about it. Elizabeth Perle McKenna left a high-powered position in publishing to search for the neglected parts of her life. In writing *When Work Doesn’t Work Anymore*, she found lots of baby boomers like herself who had bought into what they call the New Oppression—hard earned success. The symptoms include burnout, boredom and lack of balance.

Suzanne Fields, “Mission No Longer Impossible—Or Is It?”
from *The Aims of Argument*

Anecdotal Introductions (or Narrative Introductions) start with a brief story that is closely related to your topic.

I was out to drinks with a man I’d recently met. “I’ll take care of that,” he said, sweeping up the check, and as he said it, I felt a warm glow of security, as if everything in my life was suddenly going to be taken care of. As the pink cosmopolitans glided smoothly across the bar, I thought for a moment of how nice it would be to live in an era when men always took care of the cosmopolitans. I pictured a lawyer with a creamy leather briefcase going off to work in the mornings and coming back home in the evenings to the townhouse he has bought for me, where I have been ordering flowers, soaking in the bath, reading a nineteenth-century novel, and working idly on my next book. This fantasy of Man in a Gray Flannel Suit is one that

independent, strong- minded women of the nineties are distinctly not supposed to have, but I find myself having it all the same. And many of the women I know are having it also.

Katie Roiphe, “The Independent Woman (and Other Lies),”

from *Esquire*

Descriptive Introductions write a detailed description to illustrate a specific point about your topic.

To the casual eye, Green Valley, Nevada, a corporate master-planned community just south of Las Vegas, would appear to be a pleasant place to live. On a Sunday last April—a week before the riots in Los Angeles and related disturbances in Las Vegas—the golf carts were lined up three abreast at the up-scale —Legacy course; people in golf outfits on the clubhouse veranda were eating three-cheese omelets and strawberry waffles and looking out over the palm trees and fairways, talking business and reading Sunday newspapers. In nearby Parkside Village, one of Green Valley’s thirty-five developments, a few homeowners washed cars or boats or pulled up weeds in the sun. Cars wound slowly over clean broad streets, ferrying children to swimming pools and backyard barbecues and Cineplex matinees. At the Silver Springs tennis courts, a well-tanned teenage boy in tennis togs pummeled his sweating father. Two twelve-year-old daredevils on expensive mountain bikes, decked out in Chicago Bulls caps and matching tank tops, watched and ate chocolate candies.

David Guterson, “No Place Like Home: On the Manicured Streets of a Master-Planned Community,” from *Seeing and Writing 3*

Definition Introductions provide an explanation of a term that your paper will cover.

While you should explain any terms that your audience needs to know to understand your paper’s content, it is important to avoid providing a dictionary definition such as: Webster’s Dictionary defines “joy” as “great pleasure or happiness.” This approach to an introduction is cliché.

The word “addiction” is often used loosely and wryly in conversation. People will refer to themselves as “mystery book addicts” or “cookie addicts.” E.B. White wrote of his annual surge of interest in gardening: “We are hooked and are making an attempt to the kick the habit.” Yet nobody really believes that reading mysteries or ordering seeds by catalogue is serious enough to be compared with addiction to heroin or alcohol. The word “addiction” is here used jokingly to denote a tendency to overindulge in some pleasurable activity.

Marie Winn, “TV Addiction: Cookies or Heroin?”

from *The Macmillan Reader 4*

Informational Introductions provide examples or statistics to open your discussion and to give a concrete example of your topic. However, avoid overusing facts and leaving out opinion or analysis - too many general examples and statistics will overshadow your writer's voice.

When Andy Rooney got in trouble last month, gay activists complained he was being publicly rebuked for his allegedly racist remarks and not for his gay bashing. They wanted to know why homophobia was viewed as less serious than racism. The case of Martin Luther King III last week brought the comparison into even sharper relief. After a speech in Poughkeepsie, NY, in which he said —something must be wrong with homosexuals, the young Atlanta politician met with angry gay leaders and quickly apologized. His father's legacy, King said, was —the struggle to free this country of bigotry and discrimination. In that light, he added, he needed to examine his own attitudes toward homosexuals.

Jonathan Alter, "Degrees of Discomfort,"
from *The Aims of Argument*

The decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic, unexpected, and extraordinary social trends of our time. Its dimensions can be captured in a single statistic: in just three decades, between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent. By the turn of the century, nearly 50 percent of American children may be going to sleep each evening without being able to say goodnight to their dads.

David Popenoe, "A World Without Fathers,"
from *Wilson Quarterly* 6

Overall, as the writer, you have many options for introducing your essay. Use the above examples as a guide, and remember to return to your introduction after you have completed your paper. This will help to ensure that all of your material works together to present an interesting and logical flow of the information.

Happy writing!