Introductions

Why is an introduction so important?

An introductory paragraph gives readers the first impression of your writing style and the topic you’re writing about. If the introduction is weak, it reflects on the rest of the paper, and readers will quickly lose interest. Your goal is to get your audience to read beyond the introduction.

An effective introduction will…

- Reflect on the length of the rest of your paper. For example, a two-page paper will have a significantly shorter introduction than a twenty-page paper.
- Familiarize readers with your topic.
- Capture readers’ attention and encourage them to keep reading.
- Establish the paper’s tone. The language used in the introduction will indicate the formality of the rest of the paper.
- Present your thesis statement or main idea, which is usually the last sentence of your introduction.

Questions to ask when developing an introduction:

- Who are my readers and what are their expectations?
- What does my audience need to know to become familiar with this topic?
- How can I capture my readers’ attention?
- How can I involve readers and make them care about this topic?
- Does every part of my introduction relate to the content in the rest of my paper?
How are introductions set up?

There is no standard format for organizing an introduction. You may want to include some of the following information:

**Background**
Give a historical overview of your topic. Your audience’s prior knowledge will determine how much background information you provide.

**Anecdotes**
Tell an interesting story that illustrates the main idea of your paper. This can be a personal experience.

**Questions**
Pose a question to your readers to get them thinking about your topic.

**Direct quotes**
Quote an expert on your topic. Don’t forget to cite your source.

**Statistics**
Include facts and figures that highlight the importance of the issue you’re writing about.

Help! I still don’t know how to start this paper.

Don’t stress over the introduction too early in the writing process. Instead, try writing the body of your paper first, and then write your introduction based on what you’ve already written. It’s easier to write an introduction once you figure out what is being introduced.