



## Writing an Introduction

### What Moves Should an Introduction Make?

An introduction should:

- Introduce your topic
- Grab the reader's attention
- Provide information that the reader needs to understand your argument
- Make your main idea clear
- Preview what is to come in your essay

A good introduction connects the reader's life to your research

A reader might finish a conversation about music or what he or she had for dinner before reading your analysis of a paperweight in George Orwell's 1984; it is up to you to make this transition as seamless as possible.

It also provides necessary context

Think about your audience and scope. The prior knowledge of the readers and length of the paper will both determine how much information you will give before beginning your analysis. Writing a 1–2 page analysis of a quote for your professor who is assumed to be familiar with it? Give a brief rundown of what you plan to say about it and why what you're saying is important. Writing a 15 page paper for your peers about Hinduism in North America? Here, you might need to introduce some historical information along with the questions that you plan to explore, as they might not be obvious to someone with no experience with the topic.

It should always introduce how you will explore your subject

What aspect of your topic are you analyzing? How do you plan to do this analysis?

## Where Do I Even Begin?

First, know that there is no single right way to write an introduction. However, some of these tips might help you get started:

1: Check your assignment. Your professors will often give you questions to answer in their prompts.

2: Start with an interesting example, quote, or question that is directly related to your topic. Be careful though, as this can accidentally be too broad. For example:

Too broad: “A picture is worth a thousand words”

Less broad: “The post-impressionist art movement of the late 19th century could never have existed without the contributions of Vincent Van Gogh”

3: Do it last. It is not unusual to write an introduction after the body of the paper is already written. Done this way, the introduction can draw direct inspiration from the shape and trajectory of the paper. It can also give you a chance to make sure you’ve “delivered” on your main claims.

4: For some subjects, a personal anecdote that leads into your claim will help readers make connections.

## Things to Avoid

1: Opening with a Dictionary Definition

If a word needs to be defined, you will have time to do so later in the paper, or even the introduction. Readers are not usually compelled to keep reading, however, when they are given a dry definition.

## 2: Opening by Talking About Irrelevant Facts About a Source

E.g., “X was published in 1907.” Unless you are using this information in your argument, don’t make the reader sift through random facts to find the important details.

## 3: Opening with a Regurgitation of the Prompt

This is especially easy to do if the prompt is a series of questions. It is good to answer them, but don’t simply fill in a blank with your own answer.

“Introductions.” University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill Writing Center, [www.writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/introductions/](http://www.writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/introductions/)

“Introductions.” University of Louisville Writing Center, [www.louisville.edu/writingcenter/for-students-1/handouts-and-resources/handouts-1/introductions](http://www.louisville.edu/writingcenter/for-students-1/handouts-and-resources/handouts-1/introductions)