

Introductions

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the basic requirements for the introductory paragraph of an essay, as well as the purpose the introduction serves and how that purpose is best achieved. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Approaching Your Introduction

2. Purpose of Introductions

3. Using a Hook

1. Approaching Your Introduction

An introduction is the most important part of any essay because it is the first thing readers learn about the text and thus has the burden of convincing those readers to keep reading.

As you tackle this crucial portion of text, you should disregard the common myth that introductions have only one paragraph. This is true for the five-paragraph essay format, but not necessarily for all texts.

Ultimately, it's up to the writer to decide how much time and space she needs to introduce the subject, topic, and thesis of any given essay or writing project.

Another prevalent myth about introductions is that they should be written first. If anything, introductions should be developed later, as they can often become a barrier for writers, especially on the very first draft.



HINT

Save the task of writing your introduction for when you know exactly what you're introducing, after you've written the rest of the essay.

2. Purpose of Introductions

There are two critical things introductions need to do:

1. Establish the essay's topic, including any conflict or controversy that will be addressed.
2. Include a clear articulation of the thesis.

Often, especially in longer and more complicated essays, the thesis as stated in the introduction is itself a summary of the more detailed argument that will follow. Still, the introduction should introduce the thesis in one way or another; it typically includes a statement of the general line of reasoning that the body of the essay will take.



DID YOU KNOW

This statement of the general line of reasoning is called a nut graph. This part of the introduction tends to state things such as, "First, I will explore x. Then I will expand on x by looking at y, and then I will demonstrate how y is really z," or something to that effect. It gives readers a very quick outline of the essay's main points—a map for them to use as they proceed through the text.

Let's review a couple of sample introductions and see what they are (or are not) doing. As you read the introduction below, look for how it establishes the essay's topic and where the thesis might be:

Modern life often means people work long hours to buy possessions that they don't have time to enjoy. But many people have decided to leave the rat race. A simpler lifestyle can reduce stress, teach self-reliance, and encourage family and social unity. I will show several of the benefits of simplifying your lifestyle and use empirical evidence to demonstrate the ways in which the American workforce has been systematically trained to work harder and longer than it needs to.

It seems fairly straightforward, right? It introduces the topic, complete with a conflict regarding the choices we make about work, and it states the thesis in no uncertain terms, advocating for an alternative lifestyle.

In this next introduction, however, things get a little more complicated:

Every society in history has had criminals, which presupposes that they also had a notion of crime. But what is crime? Literally, crime is defined as whatever actions a government says are criminal. Simple, right? But to truly explain crime—that is, to explain its nature and why some acts are illegal while others are not—is a much more difficult task. And that's why we need the death penalty.

In this sample, it should have been fairly easy to identify both the topic and the thesis. Yet something is missing. There isn't any kind of reasoning yet, so it is difficult to know how or why the writer is connecting this broad topic of crime to the death penalty, especially given the historical stance the introduction seems to be taking.

Therefore, take this as an example of how an introduction can technically do everything it needs to do and still fail in a very important way.

3. Using a Hook

No discussion about introductions would be complete without mentioning hooks. If you recall, we started off by talking about how introductions are the most important part of a text because they come first and therefore have the burden of convincing the reader to keep reading.

That's where hooks come in. Hooks are actions or strategies that introductions can use to try to catch the reader's interest.

A few of the most common hooks are:

- A provocative anecdote or situation
- A compelling quotation
- A concession
- An interesting fact or statistic
- An analogy, to compare one thing to another
- A definition of a key term



HINT

Quotations, if overused, will have the opposite effect and bore readers, especially readers who are already familiar with the quotation or the subject.

Concessions are particularly useful in essays that will make a controversial argument, as they tend to help build credibility for the writer.

A definition typically works well when it's not just a dictionary definition, but also an explanation as to how the term's meaning is being debated or how it's central to the essay's claim—something to make it clear why it's not only important to the essay, but to the reader as well.

Let's look at some more example introductions and see if you can identify the type and effectiveness of the hook or hooks they use. It should be fairly easy to determine the type in this first essay:

Every morning, crews hose down Bourbon Street in the French Quarter of New Orleans. They cover the pavement and sidewalks with soapy water, washing away all evidence of the previous night's activities. Before the bars open and any of the tourists who left the spilled beer and daiquiris manage to stumble out of bed, the streets will again be washed and ready, waiting for them and their money. Years of observation have taught me there's something about the way we behave when we know we're not going to spend much time in a place, especially when we're paying for it. It's the nature of tourism that changes our perceived responsibilities as humans, and the problem isn't just with tourists.

You can see how using Bourbon Street as a provocative anecdote or situation helps the essay establish its topic and also makes the reader more interested in reading about tourism.

Now, here's a completely different argument's introduction:

Racetrack Playa, in Death Valley National Park, is well known for the phenomenon of tracks left by hundreds of rocks plowing across the nearly flat playa surface. Rock movement by pebble- to boulder-sized pieces of dolomite and granite leave tracks in the playa surface, showing the direction of motion via grooves cut in the playa mud. Remarkably, multiple rocks commonly show parallel tracks, including apparently synchronous high-angle turns. The phenomenon of rock motion has excited considerable interest, and various mechanisms for rock motion have been proposed, but owing to the harsh nature of the playa surroundings, and the difficulty of access, there has been no unambiguous determination of the mechanisms for rock motion.

In this introduction, the author chooses to foreground the mystery surrounding the subject, making the moving rocks of Death Valley more real because of it. If the essay had simply started talking about all the research and scientific experimentation that was done, chances are many readers would lose interest.

Finally, here is the last sample:

Commensalism is the name for a biological interaction in which one organism benefits and the other derives neither benefit nor harm. In a stable environment—like that which occurs in isolated environments—organisms evolve to lose anything that isn't necessary to their daily needs. But when that environment changes, and the organisms upon which others depend can no longer survive, entire ecosystems can crash. Though much less commonly known than the related terms of parasitism and symbiosis, commensalism is common when multiple species live together in non-predator-prey relationships.

In this introduction, there is a definition being used, introducing the relatively uncommon term around which the argument will be built, and simultaneously displaying the essay's topic. It's also implying that the reader's assumptions about symbiosis and parasitism are incorrect, which is a challenge—another way to engage and hook readers.



BIG IDEA

Regardless of the hook used, the purpose of an introduction is to front-load the "So what?" part of the essay, compiling all the reasons your readers need in order to believe whatever the rest of the essay will try to convince or tell them about.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that when **approaching your introduction**, it's important to keep in mind that the length of this portion of the essay will depend on the content and goal of the text. Therefore,

waiting to write the introduction until have you have written the majority of the essay can be a helpful strategy. You also learned that the **purpose of introductions** is to establish the topic of the essay and clearly communicate the thesis. Finally, you explored the benefits of **using hooks**, which are actions or strategies that introductions can employ to try to catch the reader's interest.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).