

Introductions: Guide for Writing Associates

Part 1: Presentation

- ★ An introduction...
 - helps your readers make a transition between their own world and the issues you will be writing about.
 - gives your readers the tools they need to get into your topic and care about what you are saying.
 - is your chance to make a first impression. The opening paragraph of your paper will provide your readers with their initial impressions of your argument, your writing style, and the overall quality of your work.
 - acts as a road map for the rest of your paper. After reading your introduction, your readers should not have any major surprises in store when they read the main body of your paper.
 - should make your readers want to read your paper.
 - answers the questions:
 - What is this paper about?
 - Why should I read it?
- ★ Strategies for writing an effective introduction:
 - **Think about the question you are trying to answer.** Your direct answer to the assigned question will be your thesis, and your thesis will be included in your introduction. Your introduction should provide background that prepares your reader for your thesis.
 - **Decide how broad or general your opening should be.** Keep in mind that even a “big picture” opening needs to be clearly related to your topic
 - **Try writing your introduction last.** You may find that you don’t know what you are going to argue at the beginning of the writing process, and only through the experience of writing your paper do you discover your main argument. It is perfectly fine to start out thinking that you want to argue a particular point, but wind up arguing something slightly or even dramatically different by the time you’ve written most of the paper. Sometimes it’s easiest to just write up all of your evidence first and then write the introduction last—that way you can be sure that the introduction will match the body of the paper.
 - **Start by writing a tentative introduction, but don’t be afraid to change it later.** Forcing yourself to write an introduction, even a tentative one, can help to propel the writing process. It’s perfectly okay to write introduction that you continuously alter to fit the argument you develop as you write the rest of your paper.

- **Be straightforward and confident.** Avoid statements like “In this paper, I will argue that Frederick Douglass valued education.” While this sentence points toward your main argument, it isn’t especially interesting. It might be more effective to say what you mean in a declarative sentence. It is much more convincing to tell us that “Frederick Douglass valued education” than to tell us that you are going to say that he did. Assert your main argument confidently. After all, you can’t expect your reader to believe it if it doesn’t sound like you believe it!¹

Part 2: Discussion Questions

- ★ What processes/methods do you use when coming up with a introduction? Do you typically write your introduction at the beginning or the end of the writing process?
- ★ What’s the biggest problem you run into when formulating a introduction?
- ★ Why are introductions so important? How do they function in a paper?

Part 3: Activity

- ★ One common method for beginning a paper is to start by introducing what others have said about your topic. For example, you could write the first sentence of your introduction by filling in one of the following templates:
 - *Conventional wisdom has it that* _____.
 - *It is often said that* _____.
 - *Many people assume that* _____.²
- ★ **Try writing your own template similar to the ones above, that you might use in an introductory paragraph.**
- ★ Once everyone is finished, go around the room and allow each person to share what they came up with. Encourage students to fill in the extra spaces on their handouts with their peers’ contributions.

Introductions: Handout

- ★ An introduction...

¹ <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/introductions/>

² Birkenstein, Cathy and Graff, Gerald. *They Say/I Say*. New York: Norton & Company, 2014. Print.

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³ UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center

⁴ Purdue OWL

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Discussion Questions

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Activity

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- *Many people assume that _____.*⁶

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- _____
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⁶ Birkenstein, Cathy and Graff, Gerald. *They Say/I Say*. New York: Norton & Company, 2014. Print.