

Introductions

The purpose of an introduction is to indicate the subject of your paper and make your point of view clear. An effective introduction also grabs the reader's attention and communicates what they will know or understand after reading your essay.

Consider writing your introduction last. That way, you know exactly what it is you'll be saying before you try to introduce it!

Don't blend in with other papers that use clichés like, "throughout history." Avoid clichés and vast generalizations. Instead, surprise your audience with a fresh and insightful take and a lively voice. Be strong!

An introduction can be one sentence or several pages long. Balance the intro proportionally to the length of the paper.

Below are three ways to start your paper. Try these and other ideas until you find a fit.

Contrast

This type of introduction usually begins with several sentences explaining a commonly held opinion, and then presents the thesis as the opposite of that opinion or belief. Here is an example:

Many people assume that learning to scuba is quite easy. They imagine that the process consists of little more than strapping on a mask and fins, wading out into an ocean, and paddling gracefully.

However, learning to scuba requires extensive training, long hours of practice, and excellent physical condition.

Funnel

In a funnel introduction, the first sentence offers a broad, general statement about the subject. Then, sentence by sentence, narrow the subject down to a specific point of view or argument (the thesis). Here is an example:

The life of a housecat is not always the safest of situations.

In fact, domesticated cats that play outside are faced with a number of problems that are often overlooked.

Most of these problems concern other neighborhood animals, which is not surprising given that the average housecat spends 40 to 60 hours outside per week.

The most serious threat to the health of the housecat is the stray dog.

Big Bang

One of the primary goals of an introduction is to inspire your reader to keep reading! Consider generating interest by starting with a question, an interesting fact, a descriptive scene or anecdote, a controversy, an analogy, or a quote. Then, explain how your opening relates to your larger topic. Finally, narrow your topic to your thesis.

According to a 2012 study by the American Pet Products Association, Americans own more than 95 million cats. Cats are the most popular household pets in the United States...

Conclusions

Conclusions re-emphasize the importance of your main idea and give your paper an overall sense of completion.

Typically, conclusions restate the thesis and perhaps the primary arguments—they are opportunities to explicitly state why what you just wrote is important.

A common mistake is mirroring your introduction too closely; instead, a good conclusion leaves your reader with something meaningful to take with them or suggestions for next steps. Here are a handful of the myriad ways to write a conclusion:

Recommended Action

In this style of conclusion, the author calls his or her audience to make a change in themselves or the world around them. The conclusion capitalizes on the opportunity not only to emphasize the argument but also to urge the audience to do something about the issue at hand:

The American obesity epidemic will only get worse if we continue to ignore the root cause of the problem. Eating well is essential, but we must be willing to commit to a more strenuous plan of action. Exercise helps keep our bodies healthy, and we can easily improve our fitness with a little extra movement every day. So put down this paper, put on your most comfortable shoes, and head outside for a 30-minute walk.

Upside-down Funnel

The upside-down funnel begins with your restated thesis and gradually becomes broader and more general. In this way, you can show your reader that what you are writing about has meaning outside of the paper, too:

The presence of stray dogs is a serious threat to housecats that play outside, but it is important to remember that cats face many other dangers as well.

Disease, injury, and infestations can affect indoor cats as well as outdoor.

In the end, the risk of owning a cat is significant, but cat owners understand that the risk is worth the benefit of having a steadfast, friendly presence in their homes.

The Call Back

Another way to give your paper a sense of completion is to come full-circle by referring to your Big Bang or other kind of opening—this time with the insights you have garnered throughout your paper.

Call for Further Research / Speculation

At the end of your paper, you may conclude that you are unable to make a definitive statement on one side or the other of the topic, either because relevant events are still unfolding or because more research or experimentation needs to be completed (by you or someone else). If this is the case, make suggestions for how the subject could be investigated further. You may also choose to speculate as to what that research or experimentation could plausibly conclude.