



WRITING STRONG INTRODUCTIONS

The expectations for introductions vary depending on the genre and context. For example, a news article usually begins with the most important factual information regarding an event—who, what, when, where, why, and how. In contrast, a creative non-fiction essay might begin with a long descriptive passage or a startling quotation.

In **academic writing**, the **main expectation** for an introduction is to **provide the necessary context for your reader** to understand your paper, including the **main issues** addressed, **texts** analyzed, and **key terms** used. Most importantly in an introduction, you introduce your reader to what your paper will be about through your thesis statement which must be in your introductory paragraph (Edwards).

➤ **What is the purpose of an introduction?**

The purpose of an introduction is threefold.

1. **Create a relationship with your reader.** Booth et al call this creating “common ground” (235). Build common ground with them by:
 - Hooking their attention.
 - Convincing them that your topic is significant and worth their time and attention (Glenn and Goldthwaite 192).
 - Gaining their trust in your authority on the topic.
 - Winning over antagonistic readers.
2. **Establish the topic of your essay**, or the problem or research question you are responding to.
3. **Deliver the essay’s thesis**, or your response to the problem. Remember, a thesis is **an arguable statement** that **limits** and **focuses a topic** enough to make it manageable and touches on the main claims the writer is making in the body paragraphs in the order in which they appear (Edwards).

➤ **What makes a strong hook?**

A hook “must capture the reader immediately and force [them] to keep reading” (Zinsser 65-66). A hook can take any of the following forms:

- An anecdote or short narrative
- An interesting question about your topic
- A relevant quotation
- Background or historical information
- Surprising facts or data
- Reflections on a paradox that characterizes your topic
- Focus on misconceptions or misrepresentations that will be corrected in the essay

As you consider your hook, **be careful to avoid dictionary definitions, clichés, and overly general statements** (e.g. “Since the beginning of time, humans have competed among themselves...)

➤ **How long should an introduction be?**

In a typical undergraduate academic essay, an introduction is usually **one paragraph**. In longer works, an introduction might be a section of several paragraphs that spend more time establishing the topic and providing a road map for the paper.

➤ **What are some examples of effective introductions?**

Stop by the Writing Center and browse Graff & Birkenstein’s *They Say / I Say* for some examples.

Or check with your instructor to see if they have a sample that is relevant to your specific assignment.

Works Cited

- Booth, Wayne, et al. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed., U of Chicago P, 2008.
- Edwards, Rachel. "Writing the Paragraph." Cabrini University Writing Center, 2017.
- Glenn, Cheryl and Melissa A. Goldthwaite. *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. 7th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.
- Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. 4th ed., HarperPerennial, 1990.