

# INTRODUCTIONS

First impressions matter – in relationships, in the workplace, and yes, in academic writing. The introduction plays a key role in shaping the reader's first impression of an academic paper. Strong introductions use compelling facts, language, and rhetorical strategies to bring the reader out of their world and into the world of the paper.

However, it is important to remember that no single method can generate the perfect introduction for every piece of writing. The form and content of your paper's opening paragraph(s) will be influenced by the type of paper you are writing, the assignment instructions, and the conventions of your academic discipline. Only by observing the following guidelines in conjunction with these factors will you be able to craft a strong introduction that engages your reader and makes them excited to learn more!

Did you know different genres of writing have different introduction styles? For example, lab reports and policy briefs are two types of writing whose introductions follow a very specific structure. When writing an introduction, always pay attention to the genre of your paper, the assignment instructions, and the customs of your academic discipline.



## How do I write an introduction?



There are a few steps you can take to begin writing your introduction:

- 1 Read introductions from the same **genre** and **academic discipline** as your assignment to gain an understanding of the writing conventions you should be following.

Still unsure? You can speak with your Professor, Teaching Assistant, or instructors at the Writing and Communication Centre about the specific genre conventions and expectations for your assignment.



- 2 Don't pressure yourself to write the introduction **first**; you can write the introduction first, last, or whenever you like in your writing process.
- 3 If you prefer to write your introduction first, always **revisit** the introduction after you have finished writing the rest of the essay to ensure that it connects to each paragraph and argument.
- 4 Before starting, take note of what the reader already knows, and what they **still need to learn** in order for the body of the paper to make sense. Is there a key text, concept, theory, event, or debate that the rest of the paper relies on? The introduction is your space to provide this **essential background information** so the reader can follow along through the remainder of the paper.

- 5 If you are a visual learner, think of the introduction as a metaphorical **funnel**: begin with the broader background information and gradually narrow in on the paper's specific focus or thesis statement.
- 6 Take special care with the very **first sentence** (see previous point about first impressions!). A strong opening sentence will be focused on the topic, catch the reader's attention, and introduce the paper's subject matter in a dynamic way.
- 7 Pay attention to **length**. Depending on your paper's genre and length overall, your introduction may be one paragraph, two paragraphs, or for very long papers, several pages. In general, you should aim to write an introduction that makes up about 10-15% of the text.
- 8 When finished, ask someone to **read** your introduction then explain to you what they think the paper's main position is, and how the paper will proceed in the body paragraphs. If their prediction is correct, you know your introduction has done its job of **setting up the rest of the paper** accurately.

## What should my introduction include?



Your paper's introduction could include any number of the following, depending on the topic and genre of writing:

**Hook:** compelling fact, quotation, or statistic that captures the reader's attention and highlights the significance of the topic.

**Explanation:** background information about a key person, concept, event, text, debate, or theory that will be relied on throughout the paper.

**Scholarly value:** brief overview of previous approaches to the topic, followed by an assertion of what your paper will add to the scholarly conversation.

**Counterargument:** information about a position or approach that the body of the paper will argue against.

**Thesis:** a statement (often placed near the end of the introduction) that voices the paper's main argument. View our Thesis Statements resource for more information on this topic.

**Roadmap:** an overview of the paper's structure and/or main points to give the reader a sense of how the paper will unfold.

**Other:** research question, hypothesis, or any other applicable information that the reader needs to understand in order for the rest of the paper to make sense.

# What are some differences between strong and weak introductions?



## A weaker introduction...

- + **Scope:** Begins with content that is so broad or off-topic that the reader cannot determine the focus of the paper until late in the introduction (if at all).
- + **Tone and style:** Asks rhetorical questions (e.g. “Have you ever thought about...?”) and/or uses clichéd phrases (e.g. “Since the dawn of time...” or “Throughout history...”).
- + **Argumentation:** Includes supporting details and evidence that belong in the body of the paper.
- + **Length:** Is either far too long or far too short compared with the overall length of the paper.



## A stronger introduction...

- + **Scope:** Provides only essential background information that is relevant to the specific focus of the paper.
- + **Tone and style:** Maintains academic tone and style by avoiding clichés and rhetorical questions.
- + **Argumentation:** Asserts the paper’s thesis and main points (if applicable) without prematurely revealing details of the supporting evidence.
- + **Length:** Comprises an appropriate fraction of the paper – not too long and not too short (10-15% of the overall paper length is a good benchmark to strive for).