

How to Write Introductions

This resource provides general strategies for writing effective introductions for argumentative essays and short (five- to ten-page) research papers. To learn more about writing introductions for subject-specific assignments like case study reports and journalistic writing, visit the [Subject-Specific Resources Page](#) at Purdue Online Writing Lab.

An effective introduction accomplishes several goals. It gives readers a basic understanding of the paper's overall topic and focus. It also provides a brief overview of others' views on this topic before introducing the writer's view. In addition, a strong introduction draws readers in, enticing them to read further.



Techniques to Use

- Topic orientation – Orienting readers to your topic is an absolute must with any introduction. Readers need to know early on what your paper's topic is and why the topic is significant to them.
- Personal anecdote – Retell an experience or conversation you had or an observation you made about your topic. Show readers your personal connection to your topic.
- Intriguing questions and scenarios – Encourage readers to think critically about your topic with a scenario (“Imagine yourself...”) or question (“What if...?”).
- Startling facts – Give a surprising fact or statistic about your topic (“Did you know that...?”) that will capture your readers' interest.
- Summary of others' views – Discuss one stance some people have taken on this topic (“Some have argued that...”). Then describe the opposing viewpoint (“Others contend that...”) before giving your view. For most types of argumentative papers, this, too, is a must with any introduction.

Techniques to Avoid

- The dictionary definition – An opening sentence like “The dictionary defines X as...” often comes across as contrived and condescending—and almost always fails to attract readers' interest.
- Broad, stale opening phrases – Expressions like “In this day and age,” “In today's society,” or “Since the dawn of time” are overused and vague and do little to orient readers to the paper's topic.
- The structural announcement – Phrases or sentences that announce the paper's structure (e.g., “In this paper, I am going to be talking you about...”) offer readers little in the way of content or focus.

To see how these techniques can be used to create effective introductions, please refer to the sample introductions below.

Sample Introductions

Sample Introduction #1: This introduction is from peer tutor Hannah Brooks's argumentative essay on energy conservation, titled “Hope for the Hippies,” which she completed for ENGL 103: Writing for a Discipline. Hannah begins with an unusual quote, then smoothly transitions from this quote into her overview of her paper's topic.

Back to our Resources page: <http://info.francis.edu/writing-center-resources-for-students/>

"Without man, is there hope for gorilla? Without gorilla, is there hope for man?" The closing lines of Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* reveal the questions we must ask ourselves today regarding the preservation of the Earth. Humans impose themselves on the Earth as if it is theirs to destroy. The Earth belongs to all organisms that inhabit it, not just the humans. Who are we to decide who lives and who dies? If we are to survive, the people of today must have an "earnest desire to save the world." One of our main problems is the myth regarding oil consumption, especially in the United States of America. We, as a population, are firm believers that oil is the fuel to live by, and that it couldn't possibly deplete in our lifetime. Unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that consuming oil is an inefficient and dangerous way to energize our world.

Sample Introduction #2: This introduction is from peer tutor Dennis Ryan's investigative report on common cold myths, entitled "Common Cold Buster: Cold Temperatures," which he completed for ENGL 103: Writing for a Discipline. Notice how Dennis effectively captures readers' interest with an intriguing question before orienting readers to his paper's topic.

Can you recall a time when you witnessed a person not wearing a jacket in the wintertime? If you have seen this unusual behavior, you may have thought to yourself, "That person is going to catch a cold in the near future." Would you be surprised to learn, however, that not wearing a jacket outside will not cause you to catch a cold? Before you dispel this idea, read on to learn how our immune systems actually work to fight colds, and, yes, it does involve a jacket.