



Writing a Strong Introduction

The beginning of a piece of writing has one purpose: to interest the reader and prompt him or her to continue reading.

Writing an introduction can be one of the most difficult challenges because it's important to hold the reader's attention from the very beginning.

To write an effective introduction, it is important to know the three most important parts:

1. A clear, effective opening sentence
2. A good indication of what your paper is about, moving from a general topic to a specific one
3. A strong thesis statement

You may have been told at some point that good introductions summarize the major points you're wishing to make in your paper; this is indeed one powerful strategy. However, it's not the only way. If you think about the pieces of writing that have interested you, you'll probably find that few if any have begun with a dry listing of the paper's contents.

However, many kinds of writing have genre conventions that dictate how the paper should start. Check with your instructor if you suspect that he or she will be expecting to see certain information in your opening.

Here are some commonly used strategies writers use to generate interest at the outset:

1. Preview the problem or issue in several sentences. End the paragraph with your thesis statement.
2. In your first paragraph, build up to a question—the central, underlying question which drives your essay (“What were the causes of the Civil War?” “How can Jungian analysis help survivors of trauma?” “Was Hamlet really in love with his mother?”). The remainder of the paper will answer this question, and a one-sentence answer you provide at some point will be your thesis.
3. Open with a strong opinion. Sometimes it's good to present your argument straight off. Use this strategy when you wish to create a sense of urgency.
4. Commence with a short story or example which elaborates on your main point. Then, throughout your paper, draw upon that story to enunciate your main points. (e.g., A sad story about a drunk driving accident could begin your argument paper about creating harsher penalties for driving under the influence).

On the following page, we'll break down a sample introduction to see how it interests the reader and provides a strong thesis statement.

The Writing Center

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A Sample Introduction

Can you imagine how much a single day can cost if you live in Shibuya, Tokyo? For instance, a simple outing to the movies would cost a couple \$46, while the same pair of movie tickets would cost just \$26.50 in New York City, which is often considered one of the most overpriced cities in the U.S. But the cost of living in Toyko is much higher than the U.S. and even in other parts of Japan, which forces many people living in the city to struggle to pay for their lifestyles. This phenomenon is likely due to three major factors: the strength of the yen against the dollar, skyrocketing price of real estate on a land space smaller than California, and inefficient government practices.

Let's break down this introduction:

1. **The topic:** Readers learn early that the topic will be about the high cost of living in Toyko.
2. **Opening sentences:** The introduction starts with a general rhetorical question and provides an interesting fact meant to illustrate the question.
3. **Indication of what the paper is about:** The introduction states the main idea: the cost of living in Toyko is higher than the rest of Japan and much of the world.
4. **Strong thesis statement:** We learn there are three concrete reasons for the high costs and can expect the rest of the paper to explore these ideas.

Remember: First impressions count for a lot, so make a good one!

Always proofread, revise, and, when possible, sit down with a tutor and talk about your writing.

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