

Writing Academic Introductions

LINKED:
Thesis Statements

Purpose

**Starting
off**

**Beg the
Question**

Conclusions

Structure

**Thesis
Statement**

Signpost



Purpose

Before beginning your introduction, you need to determine the purpose of your essay. Is it:

- **discursive / argumentative**
- **a narrative**
- **descriptive**
- **expository**
- **comparative.**

This will have an effect on the way you introduce the topic at the very start of your introduction. It will also determine whether or not you need historical facts, definitions, contrastive opinions or statistical information.

**Essay
Types**

Types of Essay

Discursive / argumentative. The aim of your essay is to argue in favour or against, or give a balanced account of a statement, theory or point of view.

Narrative. This may be a historical account, or to show the progression / changes of theories, behaviour, opinions or policies.

Descriptive. You may be describing a process or particular area of your subject.

Expository. You may be required to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea.

Comparative. Your aim is to compare and contrast various theories, methodologies, approaches or items for a particular purpose.

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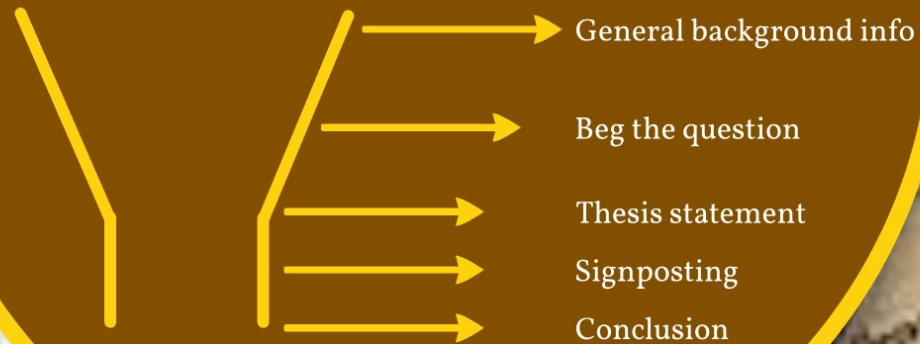
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Structure

Your introduction should follow this simple structure that is likened to a funnel. You start of with broad, background information. As your introduction progresses, the information becomes more specific and will in turn lead to the explicit thesis of your essay.



There are alternative ways to order and combine the last three elements. Examples will be given later.

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Quotes

Starting Off

Definitions

Ultimately, you want to get the reader's attention right from the start. At the same time, you need to make it clear what the reader is about to read. So how do you do it?

Again, it comes down to the type of essay you are writing. Also, bear in mind that your introduction should take up around 10% of your overall word count, so it can't be too wordy.

Statistics

Anecdotes

Using Quotes

You can start your essay off with a direct quote. The quote may be:

- controversial - something to start off an argument
- historical - to give context and/or a starting point.

You may even use two opposing quotes.

(Remember to cite them)

Make sure the quote is from an authority figure - someone who is recognised in the field, even if their work is contentious.

Using quotes indicates that you have done an element of research. What you say about this quote, and how you use it also helps show the reader your position on the subject.



Quotes

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Definitions

It may be necessary to define some key terms. This is not the same as dictionary definitions. There may be nuanced "slippery" words or terms that are interpreted in different ways. It is therefore important that you show your understanding of the term(s) as it may affect how the reader understands your train of thought.

This is more common in the *Arts* as scientific terminology is usually explicit.

As before, the definition may come in the form of a quote from an authority figure or institution. You may also use opposing definitions as a basis for your argument.



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Statistics

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Statistical Information

Using statistics is probably the safest way to start of an essay, It shows that you have done some research and it can put things in to context immediately and effectively. You may even grab the reader's attention if the information is particularly surprising.

However, some types of essay and subject areas do not lend themselves to this type of introduction.

Again, make sure you cite the information and that your source is credible* - **statistics are not supposed to lie!**

See the CARS criteria for assessing sources of information.

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Anecdotes

Using anecdotes and stories can have its benefits. It shows that you have a personal interest or connection to the area of study you are writing about. It may also indicate an element of experience in the field.

However, anecdotal evidence can become rather wordy and, at the end of the day, it is unsubstantiated evidence.



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Beg the Question

Now that you have introduced the general area that you are going to write about, you have "beg the question", i.e. make your essay relevant.

If someone reads your introduction and can respond by thinking, "So what!" or, "What's the **point of this!**" then the reader will have no interest in your work.

**An
Example**



If, like me, you believe the 1969 moon landing was fake and you wish to prove it in your essay, the majority of people can simply think, *well it happened so long ago and the common position is that the moon landing was real so why should I read this. What difference does this essay make?*

This is the point where you have to make your essay relevant to today - show that what you are proposing has implications in its field of inquiry.

Staying with this idea of the moon landing. If you are calling into question NASA's integrity, then questions need to be asked about any recent findings that have been proposed by them. For instance, their discovery of the the first planet - *TOI 700 d* in their proposed *habitable zone*.



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Thesis Statement

...a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved.

This is the most important part of the essay. It is your thesis statement that is the thread that holds everything together. It is the thesis statement that will keep you on track and make the purpose of your essay explicitly clear to the reader.

**Thesis
Statement**

- Write the purpose of your essay in its simplest form. Use first person so that your intentions are clear in your mind.
I will compare x and y to see which one performs better for the purpose of z.

- Now, carefully decide on the verbs that you will use in your thesis statement and for your signposting. The verbs you use will determine how to approach your writing and make your intentions clear to the reader.

Verbs such as, compare, analyse, determine, establish, demonstrate, highlight etc. See the full list - Academic Verbs for Introductions.

- You now have two choices:

1. Write in third person - This essay will compare x and y.
2. Use the passive voice - X and y will be compared.

It is generally accepted that the passive voice is more 'academic'. Check with your institution on their preferred 'voice'.



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Signpost

You should have already planned the overall structure of the essay. Depending on the length of the essay, you may wish to organise your work section by section, or paragraph by paragraph.

This is necessary to 'signpost' i.e. explain to the reader how you aim to address the question.

I will begin by looking at the strengths of x. This will be followed by looking at the strengths of y. The final section will compare the weaknesses of both x and y."

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Conclusions

You may wish to include your conclusion as part of the overall thesis. Rather than leave your thesis open ended, you explicitly state the final conclusion.

For example, *It will be proven that y outperforms x in the situation of z. In the first section of this essay, the strengths of both x and y are analysed. Their respective weaknesses are then highlighted. Using these findings, it can be determined that y is more effective than x.*

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