

Introductions

SUU Writing Center
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An introduction is perhaps the most important section of your paper. An essay needs a strong beginning; this characteristic may be the first one your reader evaluates. Unfortunately, a weak introduction also can be the easiest mistake to notice, since it occurs, of course, at the very beginning. While your reader may appreciate the cleverly written body and conclusion of your paper, if your introduction lacks focus, interest, and clarity, s/he will ultimately be confused about your argument.

In academic writing, use your introduction to structure the body of your paper. (For more information on thesis statements, please see the Thesis Tipsheet.) For example, if you list three points in your introduction, discuss those points in that order throughout your paper. Remember, the introduction is the foundation for your paper. When the points you assert are not discussed in the body of your paper, your argument crumbles. Condensing these points into a thesis statement and referring back to the thesis in each body point will strengthen the overall organization of your paper. Consistently referring back to your thesis may seem laborious and tedious, but your effort helps create a coherent paper. In the end, you will find that your body and your conclusion are much easier to revise when your introduction is already solid. Below is a “progressive chart” that lists three main purposes for an academic introductory paragraph. Use the pattern described to evaluate whether your introduction has any weaknesses.¹

Purpose:	Example Sentences:
FIRST: Immediately notifies readers of the subject to be addressed.	Flaws in the current campaign finance system have allowed money and power to take control of federal elections. Over half of the United States population is concerned about this system and feel that Congress should pass some sort of campaign reform legislation (Cox par. 45). Even representatives themselves recognize the need for reform.
SECOND: Narrows the subject	Inasmuch as the citizens and representatives recognize the need for reform, Congress should pass a law to change the current system of financing campaigns. Existing laws create an unequal playing field in favor of wealthy and powerful candidates and place greater importance in special interest groups, leading the populace to be more cynical toward government.
LAST: Asserts the specific argument that the paper will pursue. In this example, this is the thesis statement of the paper. Please note that the theses do not always have to come at the end of your introduction.	New reforms should include banning soft money, limiting all personal campaign expenditures, and increasing the amount of individual donations from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Reform would allow the best candidate to win the election and return the candidates' focus to their constituents.

¹The above introduction is taken from a *Scriblerian* essay contest winner's paper entitled "The Need for Campaign Finance Reform" by John D. Bunkall.

If such an approach sounds too formal to you, consider the following introductory techniques to “lead up to” your thesis:

- Begin with a descriptive scene or anecdote that illustrates the problem or issue you intend to address.
- Start with a striking quote.
- Raise the central question your essay intends to answer.
- Try a startling fact.
- Outline the problem that needs to be solved in the most concise, convincing, and vivid way possible.
- In academic papers, briefly sum up the lines of arguments that appear in past research on the topic before you explain why you’re rejecting and/or accepting such arguments.

NOTE: Conclusions should tie back to introductions. See the Conclusions Tipsheet for ideas about how to make connections.