

## Introductions

Drafting your paper will involve writing a beginning for your paper. This introduction is the first thing that your audience reads, so you need to make your first impression on your reader. You definitely want this first impression to be a good one, and you'll have to make some decisions to make your introduction an invaluable part of your paper.

One of the most common kinds of introductions is the “inverted pyramid” style paragraph. This type of introduction moves from a general statement about a trend or an idea and then works toward the specific. Here's an example:

The Puritans left England in a time of religious persecution and fled to a country they believed would offer the freedom to worship as they liked. The irony in this situation is that they denied others that same liberty. William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* offers insight to the struggles faced by the Pilgrims while trying to sustain a community based on Puritan piety. Bradford shows the colony's demise through the citizens' adherence to a moral and religious code.

The first sentence sets up the context of the paper and engages the reader. Each sentence that follows it becomes more specific, and this increasing specificity culminates in the most specific sentence-- the thesis statement that sets up what the paper will be about. As with the example, your introduction should accomplish two general purposes: engage your reader and establish your thesis.

### Engage Your Reader

You can use many techniques to engage your reader. Your goal is to set up a context within and for your paper that is both interesting and informative for your audience. Several strategies can help you lead your reader into the world of your paper or set up a context in your introduction. What kind of context you need to provide or how you go about engaging your audience depends on what kind of information your audience needs in order to understand your discussion. Below are a few strategies that you may employ in drafting an introduction for your paper.

- Provide background
- Establish the problem and competing points of view
- Review the literature
- Supply a brief narrative/anecdote
- Include a surprising statistic or fact
- Define key terms
- Use a relevant quotation

These are only a few of the strategies available for you to use, and you may use them in combination. How do you know which strategy or combination of strategies to choose? As you think about trying different strategies in your paper, you'll need to ask yourself several questions:

- What strategy would my audience or reader expect?
- What information does my audience need in order to understand my thesis?
- What strategy is most meaningful for my thesis statement?

### Establish Your Thesis

Two parts make up the introduction: engaging your reader and establishing your thesis.

A thesis is the controlling idea for your paper. In many introductions, the final sentence in the introductory paragraph(s) states the thesis. It may include your main idea, your attitude toward the idea, and your purpose. Your “attitude toward the idea” is your opinion of the topic. Your thesis cannot be a statement of fact; rather, your thesis statement has to be an assertion about that fact.

Let's look at an example.

Audience	Psychology students, especially those who plan to offer marriage counseling,
Purpose	need to be informed
Main Idea and Your Attitude	that marital roles adopted by husbands and wives are determined as much by their individual social networks as by family history or personal values.

You can see above that the writer identified her audience. You also may need to identify your audience, depending upon your instructor's guidelines. However, even if you don't have to state your audience, it will play a large role in what you're writing about.

Frequently, an organizational statement will follow, or perhaps even be part of, the thesis. Organizational statements list the order of discussion and the details in the paper's body paragraphs.

Let's look at an example that establishes the context and provides a thesis.

In the last 20 years, hot air balloons have gained a significant amount of attention. Recently, this focus has caught the eye of the media, with numerous adventurers seeking to stake their claim as the great firsts in this thrill-seeking sport (**context**). Communication students (**audience**), particularly those individuals wishing to enter the field of broadcasting (**more specific audience**), need to become familiar with this recent mid-air craze as it is certain to capture the public's curiosity (**purpose and controlling idea**). This paper discusses the various motivations for these types of trips (**main idea 1**), examines their successes and failures (**main idea 2**), and identifies the future trends in hot air ballooning (**main idea 3**) for these sky-venturers who have floated their way into today's headlines (**organizational statement identifying three ideas to be discussed**).

In this example, we've indicated the main parts of the introduction: the context, purpose, controlling idea, audience, and organizational statement. The introduction sets up the author's purpose and audience with the statement "Communication students, particularly those individuals wishing to enter the field of broadcasting, need to become familiar with this recent mid-air craze as it is certain to capture the public's curiosity." This information conveys to the reader that the purpose is informative; the audience is communication students, especially those entering broadcasting; and the controlling idea concerns the recent craze related to hot air ballooning. The organizational statement follows and identifies the three main ideas that the paper will discuss: "various motivations;" "successes and failures of trips;" and "future trends."

This handout has given you a lot of strategies concerning how to introduce your paper, but please consider a few things that you shouldn't do in an introduction.

1. Don't apologize for your topic.
2. Don't repeat your paper's title in the introduction, unless it's part of a quoted line, book title, etc.
3. Don't define terms that would be familiar to your audience (i.e. Webster's definitions).
4. Don't begin your paper with trite phrases (such as "from the dawn of man" or "in today's society").

Writing introductions can be a difficult part of the writing process, but, you may compose your introduction either at the beginning or end of the writing process. Don't feel pressured to your paper by writing the introduction. You can begin with a body paragraph and write the introduction later. Ultimately, when you write your introduction isn't as important as what you actually say in it.

Adapted from the University of Houston—Victoria: <http://uhv.edu/ac/research/write/draftintroduction.aspx>