

The Art of the Introduction

Effective opening paragraphs provide necessary background information, and, often (though not always), present the thesis of the text. A strong introduction should also get readers invested in your topic. The content of your introduction should be guided by your topic, your thesis, and the genre or discipline in which you are writing. For shorter essays, introductions may be a single paragraph, although for longer works they may be several paragraphs or an entire chapter.

Common Approaches to Developing an Introduction

- Use (and cite) a surprising statistic or fact.
- Ask a thought-provoking question.
- Incorporate an interesting, related narrative.
- Use (and cite) an appropriate quotation.
- Provide a short historical context for your topic (and cite any sources referenced).
- Explain how your ideas fit into existing conversations about your topic.

Practice

Pick up a textbook, a collection of essays, or search [Walker Library](#) for articles on a topic of interest. Read the introductions to several chapters or articles and make notes of which of the strategies were used. Add strategies you find that don't appear on this list. Consider which strategies you found most effective or most appropriate for the article's topic, purpose, or audience.

Developing an Introduction for Your Project

There are as many approaches to writing an introduction as there are texts; the following questions can help ensure that your introduction will be effective and appropriate for your project.

1. **What is the *purpose* of my project?** Am I writing to persuade? To inform? Your purpose in writing should be communicated by the end of your introduction.
2. **What is the *tone* of my project?** Is this a serious topic or could humor be appropriate? Is the writer excited? Angry? Set readers up with appropriate expectations for your project by establishing the right tone from the beginning.
3. **What do my readers need to know about my topic in order to understand my argument(s)?** The introduction is often a great place to bring readers up to speed and set the stage for what you want to tell them.
4. For argumentative papers: **How likely is my audience to agree with my point of view before reading?** If you already have a sense of how your audience will feel about your argument, you may be able to use that to your advantage in the introduction.

Use your answers to these questions to help you brainstorm an approach to your introduction. Freewrite using some of the approaches at the top of the handout to brainstorm potential approaches.

Want feedback on your introduction? Let the Writing Center help! Stop by LIB 362 or visit us online at mtsu.mywconline.com to schedule an appointment.