

An introduction is the opening statement of your essay. It is intended to inform your audience about what your topic is, why it is important, and what core claim (thesis statement) you plan to support with evidence. Your introduction will lay the foundation that the body of your essay will be built upon. As such, it is critical that your introduction is written clearly, crisply, and concisely. This guide's purpose is to ease the anxiety associated with writing an introduction by providing useful strategies and simple examples. What follows is a short list of the “**Do’s**” and “**Don’ts**” for writing a solid introduction.

## Purpose

**DO:** Clearly show your audience what your paper is about.

Try starting your paper with a simple definition or explanation. You will rarely go wrong if you begin your paper with an “**is/was**” statement of terms. For example, if you are writing about “environmental racism,” the first three words of your paper could be “Environmental racism **is**...” followed by a succinct definition of environmental racism. A paper about Sigmund Freud could easily begin by writing “Sigmund Freud **was** an Austrian psychoanalyst from the 19th Century whose beliefs about the subconscious mind laid the early foundations for modern psychotherapy.” By using this technique, your audience will know who or what you are talking about, while also familiarizing themselves with the context of your topic.

**DON’T:** Summarize the history of life, the universe, and everything in between.

A frequent problem with introductions is the tendency of the writer to put in too much. A large paper requires a large introduction, as the thinking goes. This is not the case. Your introduction should be limited in scope and scale; its only purpose is to show your reader **what** topic the paper is about, **what** is important or relevant about the topic, and **what** you will say about the topic.

## Organization

**DO:** Build a road map for the body of your essay (Thesis Statement)

Nobody wants to look for buried treasure using a map that doesn't make sense (or doesn't exist). If you want your reader to travel from “Location A” to “Location Z,” make sure you point out the important landmarks they will need to visit in-between, and what is noteworthy about them. It doesn't need to be a list, but some useful hints about the important stops on the road will help the reader feel at ease with taking their first steps of the adventure. Tell the audience where they are going!

**DON’T:** Include claims or information that won't be supported or covered in the body

If your introduction mentions it, the paper should cover it. If you are writing a paper about teen pregnancy, your audience doesn't want or need to know about global warming or what you had for breakfast. That is a sentence of your introduction you could have used to state the importance of teen pregnancy or what aspects of it your paper will discuss. When in doubt, take it out.

# Audience

**DO: Tell your audience why your topic is important**

The second (or possibly third) sentence of your introduction should tell your audience why your chosen topic is important and worthy of their interest. This is your chance to show your reader why your paper is important to them either personally or professionally. For example, in the case of Sigmund Freud, you could say that “Generations of psychoanalysts treated his theories as unassailable facts for decades, which in turn led to poor diagnoses and treatment plans for many troubled or mentally ill patients.” By giving your readers a brief explanation about the social effects of Freud’s legacy, your audience can relate in human terms to the topic and feel engaged with your paper.

**DON’T: Assume your audience is already familiar enough with your topic to care**

People often believe that their ideas about certain topics are universally held by their audience, but if this was the case, there would be no need to write academic research papers. While you might think that it is important for NASA to send a human crew to Mars, or that every pet should be spayed or neutered, others might not have the knowledge or context needed to feel personally invested in the topic. If you believe strongly in the value of your cause, tell your audience plainly *why* it matters. You can’t change anyone’s mind if you can’t first persuade them to engage with your argument by reading through to the end of your paper.

# Style

**DO: Keep your style simple**

Many blossoming writers are told that their introduction needs to be “catchy,” “poetic,” and “grab the reader’s attention.” However, your purpose should not sacrifice itself for the sake of prose. No matter how clever your introduction may be written, you might lose the reader’s attention if they are unclear about the subject of your paper and the direction it will take. Hit the main targets your paper is aiming for, and then move on. Simplicity makes your audience feel welcome, while confusion can make your readers feel left out and struggling to find their place in your paper.

**DON’T: Write like Thomas Jefferson**

*“In the beginning, and since the dawn of man, and throughout history, and over the course of human events, and hereto, and therefore, and...”*

Unless your paper is intended to overthrow the established political order of the 18th Century, you don’t need to start like this. The fancier your introduction, the less your introduction will clearly explain your topic. Keep it simple with appropriate words and phrases, and tell us about the topic.

...And there you have it. By following these simple suggestions (and avoiding the cautionary tales), your introduction will be understood and appreciated by almost any reader. Not only will you have an easier time writing introductions, your audience will have an easier time reading them.