

Drafting Your Introduction



Introductions set the stage for your paper by orienting the reader to the topic and previewing your main ideas. You can think about the introduction as having **3 parts**:

1. The Exordium (Latin for “beginning the web”)

The exordium should capture the reader’s attention and bring the reader into the world of your paper. The exordium could be an anecdote, a fact, an interesting quotation, a question, a provocative statement, or just a few sentences of description. The goal is to orient your reader.

Some tips:

- Avoid dictionary definitions (they are boring)
- If you ask a question, make sure it is a complex question that sparks the reader’s interest

2. The Narratio (Narration)

The narratio gives a brief account of the situation your paper addresses. Include anything that is necessary to bring the reader up to date on the topic. What is the current situation? What created the situation? The narratio can also include the “Who Cares?” of your topic. Who is affected by this? Who is researching this? What is the current academic conversation about the topic?

Some tips:

- Keep your background section narrow: avoid writing about the whole history of your topic. Avoid statements like “Throughout all history...” and “Since the beginning of time...”
- Imagine that your audience is intelligent, but might not be aware of the **current** status of the topic. One strategy might be to imagine your audience as an extremely bright international student.
- Including too many quotes from sources will weaken your introduction.

3. The Divisio (Thesis)

The divisio is the thesis or controlling idea of your essay. It should also preview your main points. When developing your thesis, think about the following:

- What is your claim? (Make sure it is a claim and not a fact.)
What are you trying to tell the reader?

Example Introduction: Capstone essay by Bobby Georges

One of my favorite things after I get home from a long day is sitting on the couch and snuggling up with my dog Rufus. I have had Rufus since he was about 8 weeks old, snatching him up from my local animal shelter the day he was available for adoption. The staff told me he was found wandering the streets in a nearby city when somebody picked him up. Rufus is 8 years old now, and is one of the sweetest, most well-behaved dogs I have ever owned. However, there are quite a few places where my dog is not allowed to be. When I tried to move into new apartments, almost no complex was willing to accept me with my dog, which meant that he had to live with my mom, and has done so for the last few years. Those apartment complexes were unwilling to house my dog, not because he was too large for the apartment, or because he had a history of fighting, or because he might have been late on a vaccination (which he wasn’t). Rufus was not permitted to live with me because the complex had a clause in their lease agreement that stated they would not accept “pit bulls” or any other “dangerous” breeds. Apartment complexes usually don’t have a choice when it comes to what dogs they won’t accept. The insurance companies that cover the properties have bought fully into the myth that all “pit bulls” are innately hyper aggressive and “natural born killers”. This stereotype is perpetuated by the media in such a way that almost all dog attacks are reported on as being carried out by “pit bulls” while pictures of snarling dogs are shown on screen or printed in papers. The fear of “pit bulls” has led to many states and cities placing an outright ban on breeding, selling, or owning a “pit bull” within municipalities. Breed Specific Legislation (BSL), otherwise known as Breed-Discriminatory Legislation (BDL), is a “law or statute that equates the qualities of a dangerous dog with a certain breed, and bans or restricts certain breeds based on identity, not behavior of a specific animal” (Weiss, 2009). However, not only are BSLs blatant discrimination, they are typically written based on inconclusive evidence, and may not even target the most “dangerous” breeds.

Exordium (blue)

Divisio (red)

Narratio (black)

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Sometimes it helps to plan the three sections of your introduction individually. Use this worksheet to make some decisions about the scope of your essay. Fill in the sections below and **then rewrite them in order**.

1. Start with the **Divisio** (Thesis)

What is the claim or thesis of your paper?

2. Next, move to the **Narratio** (Background & Context)

What background information does the reader need to understand your paper? Remember to keep your focus on the current situation (don't go too far back in history). You can include people who have a stake in your claims, recent events, and what people are saying about the topic (the larger academic conversation).

You can use the following sentence frame to clarify what other people are saying about the topic.

In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been _____. Whereas some are convinced that _____, others maintain that _____.

Make a list of the essential background information.

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3. Finish by writing the **Exordium** (Opening Sentences)

Write a few sentences to draw the reader into the world of your paper. (See reverse for examples/ideas)

4. Draft your introduction

Using a separate sheet of paper, use the above information to draft an introduction.

Make sure to rewrite your intro in the following order:

Exordium

Narratio

Divisio