



Intro to Academic Intros

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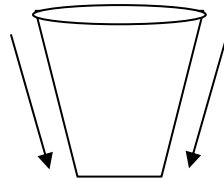
Writing the Introduction

Let's start with some don'ts: Introductory paragraphs with only one or two sentences rarely work. Avoid this risky strategy unless you know that you can pull it off and that it will be appropriate for your class or exam.

Instead, write four to six sentences. Include a thesis in the paragraph, but otherwise you don't need to follow a set formula. **Probably the most logical place for the thesis is at the end of the intro.** Two sentences are fine, if needed, but be cautious of using more than two sentences for your thesis. More than two usually means that the thesis is vague and needs sharpening.

Don't write more than one introductory paragraph, and don't separate the thesis from the rest of the introduction. Remember, this paragraph makes a very important first impression on your readers; proofread it especially carefully. Here are sample introductory paragraph styles. Notice how each uses **the funnel effect** to gradually narrow focus on the thesis statement, which comes at the end of the paragraph.

Begin your intro with a general statement related to your topic.



Gradually narrow the focus of your sentences as you prepare the reader for your thesis statement.

Make your thesis statement the last sentence of the intro paragraph.

Topic: If you were forced to live without television, how would you spend the time you normally spend watching TV? Discuss.

1. General observations and a general thesis

Most Americans, it seems, spend much of their time watching TV. They come home from work, hastily prepare their Swanson TV Dinners or Budget Gourmets, and flop down in front of their television sets. From that point until bedtime, they become human vegetables, ignoring other pursuits in favor of a line-up of "Fear Factor," "Joe Millionaire," "Friends," and the 11:00 news. At 11:30 they fall into bed, anxiously awaiting the new day's TV "fix." Personally, if I were forced to live without television, I would be a more well-rounded person.

2. Personal example and a general thesis

During my senior year in high school, I had already been accepted into the college of my choice and completed most of my high school requirements, so I suddenly found myself with a great deal of spare

time on my hands. Rather than joining the school band and drama club, playing touch football with my friends, or even reading a good book, I rushed home every day after school, eager to watch my afternoon soaps. Unfortunately, once I hit the living room couch, I usually stayed there for the rest of the day. I began to cultivate a habit which soon became hard to break. Today, if I were forced to live without television, life would be much richer than it has been so far.

3. Introductory sentence, general thesis, and supporting points

Like most of my friends, I spend too much of my time watching television. If I gave up television entirely, I would be much better off. First, I would probably join a health club where I could work out in the late afternoon instead of watching "Seinfeld" reruns. I would also have more time to spend with my friends, talking and pursuing common interests. Most importantly, out of sheer desperation and boredom I might even spend time studying, something I can never seem to find the time to do now.

A mathematical ["first," "second," "third"] introduction is safe and acceptable, but it can get very annoying very quickly if overused. However, it can be a good strategy for in-class essay exams. The danger in this intro strategy is the temptation to say too much about your main points instead of merely listing them.

4. Personal observations and a specific thesis

Sometimes I think about what my life would be like if I were forced to give up television completely. Having spent most of my formative years sitting in front of the TV set watching characters enjoy active lives rather than living my own, I would obviously feel deprived and at loose ends. My current lifestyle and my moderately pleasant disposition would both be threatened, at least temporarily. But if I were forced to give up television, I would eventually compensate by spending more quality time with my friends and family and pampering myself in ways I rarely have time for now.

Sample Student Introductions

Notice that actual introductions often do not follow one pattern exactly. However, having access to a number of patterns can help if you typically have trouble beginning your essays. Remember that your purpose in writing an introduction is to narrow and attack the topic, demonstrating that you have a clear purpose for the paper and a blueprint for its development.

1. Topic: What would you place in a time-capsule to allow people opening the capsule 1,000 years from now to understand life in the 1980's? Explain.

Life one thousand years from now will be completely different from life in 2004. Because of technological advances and the powers of fate, human beings will have long abandoned the 21st century's way of life. If a time capsule is the only way of explaining 2003 to future generations, I would make sure it contains three particular items: a dictionary, a copy of the 2004 American tax form, and a week's worth of *The New York Times* newspaper.

2. Topic: What is your most prized possession? Why?

In the 23 years I have been alive, I have experienced many changes. These changes include the normal periods of physical and mental growth and the normal wants and needs of each time period in my life. During infancy, I assume that my most prized possessions were milk, toys, and my mother. Next, prized possessions came to be crayons and recess time on the playground. My teenage years brought on boys and roller-skating. At this peak point in my life – a young adult pursuing a professional education – I feel that prized possessions should not be fads anymore. They have become necessary to my life and my education. If I had to choose just one thing as my most prized possession, it would be my computer. Here are the reasons why: