

Introductions

Things NOT to do in an introduction

Apologize: never suggest that you don't know what you're talking about, that your topic is dull, etc. "Although I'm not an expert on obesity, I wish to discuss it anyway."

Give your opinion directly: never state that the paper is your opinion. Of course it's your opinion; it's your paper! Would you be presenting someone else's opinion? To say "In my opinion," is to be repetitively redundant.

Announce your intentions: don't flatly announce what you are about to do in an essay: "In this paper I will tell you about junk food in school." That works really well in fifth grade when you're learning to write essays, but you're in the big game now: act like you know what you're doing.

Use a dictionary or encyclopedia definition: definitions might be really useful, and you might want to devise your own definition later in your paper. But it's similar to that fifth grade approach; be a little more subtle.

Dilly-dally: don't lollygag! Yes, you can do some fun stuff with intros, but sometimes the intro takes longer than the paper. This is especially dangerous with in-class writing.

Take up space: don't pump your intro full of words just to make it longer and satisfy some requirement. If your intro is short, keep it that way. If you think it's too short, spend time going back for a revision or two.

The dawn of man: this kind of intro generally makes broad sweeping statements about the relevance of the topic since the beginning of time: "Since its inception slavery has been a blight on humanity." It may be true, but so is the statement "air is good to breathe." That doesn't make it an interesting intro.

The book report: again, the fifth grade approach. It supplies all the main points of the paper with no embellishment or thought. It's a "just the facts" approach: "Capital punishment is bad. It is bad for three reasons. The first reason is that the crime rate does not decrease. The second reason is that innocent people could be sent to death row..."

Assume the reader has a clue: (applicable only on WOD). Don't start your paper assuming your reader has just read your prompt. Your paper should stand alone. If your prompt is, "Define success and give examples" don't start your paper saying something like "It's all about winning." Your reading won't know what you're talking about.

Use the title as the question: (applicable only on a piece that has been assigned). You may feel that the title says it all: "Capital punishment is wrong." Then the first sentence of the introduction might be "It's wrong for several reasons." There's no guiding the reader, no lead in, no subtly, no forethought.

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Things TO DO in an introduction

The purpose of an intro is to:

1. Tell the reader what the paper is about (thesis)
2. Catch the reader's interest
3. Forecast some items in the paper (sometimes)

For the first characteristic to be met, have an excellent thesis that provides clear direction.

For the second characteristic to be met, play with the following approaches.

Surprising statement or statistic: surprise the reader into continuing with your paper: "Seventy-five percent of high school students don't get hair cuts during the school year."

Interesting anecdote: an anecdote is a little story. Tell a short story that relates to the topic (it should be a very small episode and not a full blown story). Be careful that your story does not take over the paper.

Historical review: some topics are better understood if a brief historical review of the topic is presented. For example, if you were doing a story on possible gender school segregation, you could start with a quick review of Brown v Board of Education.

Question: draw the reader into your paper by directly addressing him/her. "Did you know that psychology is the number one major in college where, after graduation, students are not employed in their field?" But be careful with this. It tends to be over-used and can sound elementary.

Drop a name: people pay attention to names they recognize. If you were going to write a paper on the rise of the gothic novel, you could mention Stephen King and some of his titles.

Use a quote: a quote is something different, something immediately factual that stands out. A paper on capital punishment could have a pretty traditional start, or you could try an interesting line: "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, for it tolls for thee."

Humor: start your paper out with a joke; even a corny one that is relevant will get your reader's attention.

Poetry: much like a quote, a poem can be a poignant and insightful method to sum up a great idea or get your reader's attention. If your paper is about career choice, you could begin your paper with Frost's "The Road not Taken."

Allusions: an allusion is a reference to another work (usually written, but not necessarily). Moby Dick begins with "Call me Ishmael." This refers or *alludes* to a figure in the Bible. In your papers you can make all kinds of allusions: biblical, literary, classical, pop cultural, etc.