

Intro to Introductions

The introduction can make or break your paper. Within those first few sentences, your reader will decide whether or not to give your work the attention that you want. It's hard to muddle through a paper that introduces itself by rambling on without coming to any firm conclusion, or that wades around in poetic frivolity while the reader just wants to know what the heck the paper is about.

The Basics: Tell them what you're going to say, then say it, and then tell them what you just said. There. It's that simple.

The Effective Introduction:

- is organized by a **thesis** listing the key points
- is brief and concise

Things NOT to Do in an Introductory Paragraph:

- Apologize. Never suggest that you don't know what you're talking about or that you're not enough of an expert in this matter that your opinion would matter. Your reader will quickly turn to something else. Avoid phrases like the following:

In my [humble] opinion . . .
I'm not sure about this, but . . .

- Announce your intentions. Do **not** flatly announce what you are about to do in an essay.

In this paper I will . . .
The purpose of this essay is to . . .

- Use a dictionary or encyclopedia definition.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary,
a widget is . . .

Although definitions are extremely useful and it might serve your purpose to devise your own definition(s) later in the essay, you want to avoid using this hackneyed beginning to an essay.

- Dilly-dally. Get to it. Move confidently into your essay. Many writers find it useful to write a warm-up paragraph (or two, even) to get them into the essay, to sharpen their own idea of what they're up to, and then they go back and delete the running start.

The following example is an introductory paragraph to a research paper on Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*. While this introduction is for a scholarly paper, the process is the same, no matter what kind of paper you're writing.

*In many modernist British novels, the views of God and of the church can be described as cynical, at best. A majority of the modern novels view the church as defunct, void of meaning, and behind the times, and view themselves as spiritual orphans wandering in a hopeless world with no God to guide them. Graham Greene, however, is the rebel among these writers. In his novel *The End of the Affair*, which appears on the surface to be about a love affair, he brings the subject of an ever-present church and an all-loving God to the forefront. Through the different perspectives of Sarah, Smythe, and Bendrix, Greene displays his theme of the importance of God in a dismal, profane world.*

Let's break down this introductory paragraph to see how the pieces make a unified whole. To get an A-worthy introduction, you need to start at the end: the **thesis**. In one sentence, what is your paper about? That sentence is your thesis. The thesis for this work is the last sentence:

Through the different perspectives of Sarah, Smythe, and Bendrix, Greene displays his theme of the importance of God in a dismal, profane world.

When you've got your thesis, you can build the introductory paragraph around it. The thesis almost always comes at the **end** of the paragraph, so that it will be fresh in the reader's mind as he transitions into your first main supporting point. But what do you say before it? This paper was for a course on the Modern British Novel; therefore, it begins by discussing how it related to the course, and the era, as a whole. Relevance is key. Whatever you are researching and reporting about, whether it's a modern British novel or the results of a scientific study on the effects of music on bees, follow these simple rules:

1. Don't dawdle about. Get to the point.
2. Make it relevant. Why should we bother reading this? What will it add to existing knowledge? And finally...
3. Have a good thesis. It will organize your entire paper, and it lets the reader know what to expect – just tell them what you're going to tell them.