



How to Write an Introduction

“Just write it!” may sound like insensitive and unhelpful advice to give to someone who is struggling to begin writing their introduction. But, it’s not bad advice. After all, the *actual* introduction, i.e., when you revise your introduction to be an accurate framing of your essay, is always written in the end. That is why, instead of worrying about how to write a good introduction you need to just take the plunge and start writing. Then revise it keeping in mind the following elements.

Characteristic of an Introduction

Size

Your introduction should be as long as you need it to be (figuring this out is a matter of practice and revision) and also because the size of the introduction depends on the overall length of the essay. For example, we have been told that a 1000 word essay will usually have an introduction that is about $\frac{1}{5}$ of the total length, which means about 200 words. However, if you feel that your introduction is complete in less than that, you do not need to follow this formula as the length of an introduction is unique to each essay. Thus, the size of your introduction could be as short as 80 words, or as long as 300 words as long as all the other elements are there. Remember though, that if your introduction is particularly long, you may want to consider diving it into two paragraphs.

Context

It is important for the reader to understand the story you are telling them as fully as possible. That is why, you should provide some essential details and background information about what you are writing so that those who have no familiarity with the topic of discussion are able to understand your message. For example, when writing a paper on the 1999 film *Earth: 1947* we should first give readers an overview of what the film is about as shown below,



Earth: 1947 (1999) depicts the deteriorating relationships of a group of working class friends—among whom there is only one Hindu woman (Shanta) so as to symbolize Mother India—belonging to different religious beliefs, and the ensuing violence organized along religious and gendered lines.

Note how within this sentence, we have covered: a) what type of film we are discussing and when it was made, and b) what the setting of the film is, in broad terms (the Hindu/Muslim riots).

Thesis Statement/Main Argument

The thesis statement or the main argument must be stated clearly in your introduction. For example, building upon the context provided above,

The film *Earth: 1947* (1999) depicts the deteriorating relationships of a group of working class friends—among whom there is only one Hindu woman (Shanta) so as to symbolize Mother India—belonging to different religious beliefs, and the ensuing violence organized along religious and gendered lines. **This paper analyzes two scenes from the film in order to argue that the representation of Shanta’s body is symbolically representative of South Asia/Baharat Mata and the crippling violence of partition that ensued.**

Notice how clearly and unambiguously the thesis statement has been written. Remember, rule of thumb is to try and communicate your main argument as soon as possible and with as few words as possible.

Basis for your Argument: The How

Another crucial element of an introduction is informing the reader as to how/on what basis you will be making your argument. This means that you need to inform your reader of not only the sources that you will be using to make your argument, but also how you will be integrating these sources within your paper (in this case, you only have one source, the film).



In the example given above, it is written, “this paper will analyze two scenes from the film *Earth: 1947* (1999).” As such, you reader now knows that it is through the content of these two particular scenes and your analysis of it that you will be making your argument.

Structure of your Paper

Another important function an introduction does is that it informs the reader of how exactly you have structured your paper. For instance, building on the example given above, you may write, “This paper is divided into three parts, where in the first part I describe the scenes and the evidence this presents to support my argument. In the second part I address the themes highlighted in the two scenes. Lastly, I conclude by giving some counter arguments as well as outline avenues of future research.” This depends entirely on the length of the paper, and whether or not it is divided into sections.

Keep in mind that not all introductions lay out the structure of their paper as shown above, all introductions do, however, prepare the reader for what they will be encountering in the coming paragraphs and/or pages. While it may not be done as explicitly as shown above, still all introductions will, without fail, prime the reader for what is to come next. In which case, you provide, usually in one sentence, the gist of your arguments (so a phrase that captures the main idea of each argument that you will be making).

Writing your Introduction Last

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, final introductions are written in the end because your introduction must accurately reflect the rest of your paper. Thus, it is necessary to come back and revise the introduction as you cannot know for certain in the beginning what shape the rest of your paper will take until you have written it.

One way of ensuring that you have all the elements written clearly in your introduction is to ask someone who is not familiar with the text/film/topic that you are discussing whether they fully understand the topic under discussion (ample context is provided), if they can identify the thesis statement/main argument, and can outline your supporting arguments/structure of the paper, then you have probably done a good job in writing an introduction that provides others with a succinct snapshot of your entire paper.

Lastly, remember that writing is a difficult task so you might not be able to get a compelling introduction in the first go, and that’s alright. With revision and practice you will eventually be able to write good introductions.