Introductions

An *introduction* locates a problem or question within a context that provides background and rationale, culminating in a *working thesis* that is interesting, timely, or important in some way.

An introduction accomplishes some of these objectives:
- defines the issue, question, or problem and says why it matters
- indicates your method in approaching the issue, question, problem, or study
- provides necessary background or context for readers
- offers a working thesis your paper will develop

Length: typically, one or two paragraphs

Shape: funnel

starts wide by providing background

then narrows to your particular subject
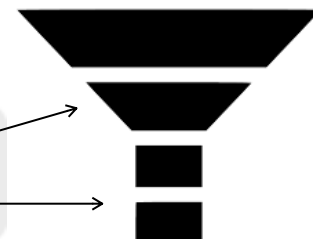
Some Ways to Begin

Give readers a brief **overview of the background or context** prompting the idea, argument, or issue at stake. Setup what's already been established (the **"catalyst"** for your essay). From there, you can let readers know the new or further discussion you are going to open up (the reason why you are writing).

Begin with **a source that can help setup your topic**. At first mention of the source, briefly summarize the source for your readers ("teach it to them"). Then move to a key idea or key quote from the source. With that information established, bring readers to the angle you want to set up for your discussion.

Lead with your second-best **example to set up the issue or question**. Save the best example for the most analytical attention in the paper, but allow your introductory example to suggest that your upcoming best example is not an isolated case, but representative of other cases.

Start with a short **narrative or anecdote** that is vivid and illustrates a key aspect of your subject. Think of this like a film opening. If you were making the film to go along with your essay, what would be the opening scene?

Begin with a **definition** that has significance for your discussion. Offer an author's definition rather than a standard dictionary definition, or offer one of your own in reaction to an author's.

Offer readers a **procedural opening** that describes your project and overall approach to the subject. Often this style is a bit "outside" of the actual paper discussion. It's an "in what follows" type of voice that gives readers a big-picture preview of your essay project.

Common Problems in Introductions

Digression: Trying to include too much background or starting at a point too far away from your immediate concerns. For example, "From the beginning of time, humans have . . ."

Incoherence: Trying to preview too much your paper's conclusion before going through the discussion that will make it comprehensible. The language may be dense and connections between sentences are missing.

Prejudgment: Trying to settle the question that will be pursued in the rest of the paper. The thesis should become more specific and complex *between* the introduction and the conclusion.

Conclusions

Conclusions go beyond restating what has come before. Rather than summarizing, they culminate by offering an answer to *"so what?"*

Length: one or two paragraphs

Shape: a funnel, then opening back out to why your subject, speculation, or analysis matters outside the boundaries of the paper

Some Ways to End

Provide a final thought that answers **"so what?"** - your qualified judgment/idea/theory on the issue or problem your paper has discussed. This should connect to the introduction by reconsidering the question or claim raised by the introduction's working thesis and revisiting why the subject matters.

Culminate by bringing things together and offering the **most fully evolved and qualified statement of your thesis** or your judgment on the question posed in the introduction. Interpret the results of your analysis by revisiting your introductory working thesis and its context.

Send the reader off by opening the topic outward into your **speculation**. Consider the broader implications as you look outward to the wider world and forward to the future.

Identify limitations by acknowledging the restrictions of your method or focus and qualify your concluding thesis accordingly. A grand and ultimate claim is not necessary. Conclusions often indicate where you or an interested reader may need to go next without actually going there.

Common Problems in Conclusions

Avoid redundancy: Instead, use *selective* repetition from the opening, reevaluating what you say in the introduction in light of where you have ended up.

Avoid raising a totally new point: Instead, clearly express the link between your concluding claims and implications anticipated by the body of the paper.

Avoid overstatement/ false remedy: Instead, draw the line at points of relative stability, a modest or qualified culmination. You do not have to have the final word on your subject nor do you need to "save the world" (or preach) to your readers at the end of an essay.

Avoid anticlimax: Instead, save an "ace" for the conclusion, some reasoning that answers "so what?" or offers a last view of implications or consequences of your analysis. Be careful of endings that take the weight off of everything you said in the paper. For example, "In the end, it's just up to people's options good or bad…"