

INTRODUCTIONS AND THESIS STATEMENTS

Introductions

The introduction is a key paragraph for both readers and writers. First impressions matter. The reader will be more inclined to read a paper and consider a position if the initial paragraph is clear, organized, and engaging. For the writer, a carefully crafted first paragraph acts as a springboard, establishing the order and direction for the entire paper.

The form and content of an introduction depend upon many factors, including the specifics of the assignment, the intended audience, the style of the discipline, and the expectations of your professor. In general, your introduction should

- capture the reader's attention
- reflect the question raised by the assignment
- provide essential context for your topic
- define key terms

Most importantly, your introduction should

- convey the *pattern of organization* you will follow in the paper
- build to the *thesis sentence*: a clear, concise statement of the specific position you will explore in your paper

Outline first

Outline your argument as fully as possible *before* starting the first draft. Outlining first helps you to see the shape of your argument, making writing the draft much easier.

Start focused

Avoid broad openers; start your argument right away. Do not open with empty filler such as "Since the beginning of time" or "For thousands of years, men, both good and evil." Open with a sentence that launches your argument: "J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* explores the latent meanings of deformity."

Use substantive statements

Each sentence should contribute to the development of your argument. Avoid fact-only sentences such as "Jane Austen uses letters to reveal important information." Incorporate facts into more substantive statements: "Austen's use of letters allows her to relay key narrative information in a concise and engaging way."

Revise

Many writers mistakenly assume the first draft of their introduction is the final draft; take the time to **revise your introduction** once you've completed the paper. Make sure that the introduction reflects what you have discovered through the process of composing the full argument.

Thesis statements

The thesis sentence is a clear, concise statement of the position you will defend in your paper. The thesis sentence should argue a position, not summarize information.

When composing your thesis sentence,

- make sure your thesis reflects the full scope of your argument.
- avoid using a thesis that is too broad to be defended in the your paper or too narrow to be a full response to the assignment.
- argue as conceptually rich a position as you can support. Ask yourself *How?* and *Why?* questions to deepen your thesis.
- make sure your reader can easily identify your thesis sentence.
- do not just reword the professor's question; claim your own position.

A thesis sentence that is too broad:

The Catholic Church's influence on the formation of labor unions in the nineteenth century was extremely significant.

A more focused thesis sentence:

The Catholic Church, by means of the pulpit and the purse, greatly influenced the labor movement in the United States during the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Note that the second sentence concisely summarizes a specific argument that can be managed in a short paper. It also sets up the pattern for discussion; the writer will focus first on the Church's direct instruction and then on its financial influence. Also note the effect of using the stronger verb "influenced" in the second sentence rather than "was" in the first sentence.

In *The Craft of Argument*, Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb suggest the following ways of **deepening the thesis**:

To add a reason, include a reason-clause beginning with *because*, or *if*, or a phrase beginning with *by* or *in order to* (84).

Because of their emphasis on the broad impact of individual decisions, environmentalists exhibit values consistent with the American tradition of civic mindedness.

To acknowledge an alternative point-of-view or reason, or to limit the scope of your claim, add a concession-clause beginning with *although*, *while*, or *even though*, or a phrase beginning with *despite* or *regardless of* (85).

Although Emma and Levin define spirituality differently, their self-centered perspectives confine them to a state of permanent disillusionment.

Sample Introductions

for Government 285

Claims that the American environmental movement undermines traditional democratic values are wrong. In fact, the movement emphasizes a commitment to compromise and a concern for the greater good that characterize the American democratic tradition. Critics argue that supporters of the environmental movement threaten fundamental constitutional rights, such as people's ability to use their property as they see fit. Critics also question environmentalists' use of lobbying to achieve goals, arguing that these tactics result in disproportionate attention given to environmental concerns. While it is true that environmentalists often advocate the adoption of policies that may restrict individual behavior, they do so within legally sanctioned bounds, recognizing that they are but one player in the formulation of public policy. By vigorously advocating for more stringent environmental standards, supporters of the environmental movement seek to persuade the American population to look beyond individual desires and to consider the broader impact of individual decisions. In so doing, environmentalists exhibit values consistent with the American tradition of civic mindedness, in which collective interests, rather than individual desires, represent the highest priority.

for English 150

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen uses letters to allow characters who are far away to communicate with one another. In that respect, letters offer a view of everyday life in the nineteenth century England. Even more important, however, is the letters' literary purpose. Austen relates some of the most important information of the narrative through letters and, by doing so, concisely presents key information about plot. At the same time, because the action is told through the letter writer's point of view, she conveys characters' attitudes toward events. Finally, the reactions the letters evoke from their readers give information about the attitude of the people who read them. The letters Elizabeth receives contain crucial information that leads to profound changes in her character—changes that make it possible for her to acknowledge her love for Darcy and that lead to her marriage.

for Biology 441

Populations are constantly changing and adapting to their environments, and species are diverging and creating entirely new lineages. What drives evolutionary change? A theoretical conflict has arisen that sheds new light on this fundamental question. Scientists are asking whether the mode of evolutionary change that has dominated theories of how organisms evolve is the correct one. Supporters of phyletic gradualism claim that evolutionary changes are gradual and continuous. A recent challenge to this theory is punctuated equilibrium, which claims that change is sporadic and fast rather than gradual and continuous. A careful analysis of the evidence shows that phyletic gradualism, rather than punctuated equilibrium, is an accurate description of evolutionary change.

for Sophomore 200

Globalization is a socially polarizing movement. Some people view it as the way of the future, while others see it as the source of current global discontent. Over the past half-century, leaders in the global economic system have encouraged the liberalization of the free market in hopes that globalization would spread the wealth of developed nations to the rest of the world. In recent years, however, awareness of the detriments of globalization has increased. Activist groups, non-governmental organizations, and developing governments have put increasing scrutiny on the organizations that power globalization, the most important of which are the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the governments of wealthy nations. Close analysis of case studies and comprehensive statistics shows that the hypocrisy of institutions and of wealthy nations, as well as the rigidity of the global economic system, have prevented the benefits of globalization from reaching the world's poorest nations.

Works Cited

Williams, Joseph M. and Gregory G. Colomb. The Craft of Argument, Concise Edition. New York: Longman Publishers, 2003.

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