



OWLS Writing Guides: INTRODUCTIONS

The introductory paragraph(s) of an essay should do three essential things:

- ⇒ engage the reader's interest
- ⇒ introduce the topic of the essay
- ⇒ state the main idea, or thesis, of the essay (what the writer has to say *about* the topic)

For expository, analytical, and argumentative essays, the most conventional organization is the general-to-specific pattern, starting with general ideas about the essay's topic and moving to more specific ideas, namely the thesis, at the end. This kind of introduction is sometimes referred to as a 'funnel' introduction because it is broad at the 'top' and narrow at the 'bottom'. The thesis usually appears last in such an introduction, and there are a number of ways you may introduce the topic and lead up to the thesis.

- 1. Begin by explaining or defining the general topic, problem or situation, before moving to a thesis that concerns it.**

Example:

When you think of a terrorist entering a subway station or airport, what crosses your mind? Do you picture a young black man because of the subway bombings in Britain? Maybe you picture a short blond woman because of her recent arrest for attempted murder of a Swedish artist who drew a derogatory picture of Mohammed? Do you think of a white man because of the Oklahoma City Bombing? Or, does the mere idea of terrorism arouse the picture of an Arab male because of the attacks on September 11? The picture you have conceived within your mind is a form of racial profiling. You are surmising that because of recent actions perpetrated by a certain type of person, the crime will most likely occur again by that same type of person; this is, essentially, terrorist profiling. Such profiling is pushed by some as the best way to prevent terrorism. Security officers would be especially watchful of people who fit the description of previous terrorists. However, this method should not be used, since determining who should be profiled proves both difficult and subjective, and any racial profiling violates constitutional rights.

- 2. State both sides of a debate before moving to the thesis.**

Example:

Global warming is an issue that has been hotly debated in recent decades. On one hand, some scientists argue that the Earth goes through cycles of temperature changes—such as with the ice ages that have occurred, the most recent having ended nearly 10,000 years ago—and that the recent spike in temperatures all over the globe is the result of these naturally occurring temperature fluctuations. Alternatively, notable activists such as former Vice President Al Gore believe that global warming is occurring as a result of an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and call for a reduction in these emissions. No matter the cause, more scientific research must be done in order to determine what can be done in order to slow down global warming.

3. Begin with historical background information in order to acquaint readers with the subject and prepare them for the thesis.

Example:

Though now it is a practice no longer employed by any except the fabulously wealthy and/or famous, it was once common for families to hire full-time governesses to watch over their children while the parents attended to their business, whether socially or financially. These women were often single, often young, and sometimes the families did not know much, if anything, about them other than by-word-of-mouth recommendation. It is one of these governesses that Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw* portrays, and James shows the folly of the master's hiring of the strange woman as she is shown to slowly descend into madness through imagined encounters with the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint and culminating in her murder of her ward, Miles, by suffocation against her breast.

4. Engage interest through an individual case or anecdote which sets the stage for the thesis.

Example:

The McMartin preschool trial was a widely publicized day care sexual abuse case that occurred in the 1980's. During the proceedings, seven defendants, including the 76-year-old Virginia McMartin faced a total of 115 counts of having sexual relations with children as young as 2 years old. In addition to accusations of molestation, the children also made such allegations as they were flushed down toilets to secret rooms where they were abused, saw witches fly and ridden in hot-air balloons, and one child even identified Chuck Norris as his abuser. The charges were eventually dropped and the defendants acquitted. Because of leading questions posed to them by questioners, and suggestions and statements made by overprotective parents, the children were pressured into making false accusations, with some children actually coming to believe that they had been the victims of molestation. It is cases like these that emphasize our justice system's needs for stronger guidelines when dealing with children, especially in cases of abuse.

There are specific introduction methods that should be avoided:

1. Stating the obvious through a flat announcement like "The purpose of this essay is..." or "This paper will be about..." will not engage, but bore readers.
2. Beginning with a dictionary definition has been overused, and the statement "According to Webster..." rarely adds to an essay.
3. Simply stating the essay's thesis, even if you do so in several sentences, is not a proper introduction, but a big thesis statement.