



## Graduate Online Writing Studio

### How to Write an Introduction

Introductions are generally the first paragraph or paragraphs of your paper and aim to both introduce the topic of the paper and give your reader an idea of what will be discussed within the paper. There are six steps to writing a strong introduction to your paper:

#### 1. Create a hook to engage the reader.

The first thing you want to do in your introduction is hook your reader's attention in some way to draw them into your paper. There are many ways to achieve this goal, and some of the most popular are as follows:

- **Ask a rhetorical question.** A rhetorical question will cause the reader to wonder what the answer is and progress through the paper to find the answer. If you ask a rhetorical question to open the paper, the paper should answer the question for the reader.
- **Include a startling statistic or fact.** A statistic or fact that is startling to the reader will intrigue them and draw them into the paper to learn more about this fact and the topic.

#### 2. Describe your topic broadly.

This second step presents a broad view of the topic to the reader so that they understand what topic the paper will focus on. In the introduction, you always want to start broad and narrow into your thesis at the end of the paragraph to continue to draw your reader into the paper.

#### 3. Explain why the topic may interest the reader specifically.

In this step, you show the reader or audience of your paper why the topic is relevant to them specifically. This step causes the reader to relate personally with the topic and get invested in the paper you are introducing. Think of why the topic would be something that someone in your field would care about and make it relevant to the reader.

#### 4. Provide background information on the topic.

Providing background information is an important job of the introduction as it makes sure that the reader understands the topic and knows any important terminology that will inform the paper or come up later as you progress through the paper. Make sure to set the table for your reader so that they have everything ready as they dig into the meal of your paper.

#### 5. State your thesis.

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in your paper because it presents the main point or argument for your paper clearly and concisely to the reader. The thesis should be one strong sentence that makes the focus of the paper clear to the reader.

## 6. Construct a roadmap for the paper.

After the thesis, you should include what we like to call a “roadmap” for the reader, previewing the various sections and parts of the paper so that the reader can clearly see where the paper is going. Avoid using first-person pronouns in your roadmap (i.e., say something like “This paper includes...” rather than “In this paper, I will include...”).

To review, there are six steps to writing a strong and effective introduction:

1. Create a hook to engage the reader.
2. Describe your topic broadly.
3. Explain why the topic may interest the reader specifically.
4. Provide background information on the topic.
5. State your thesis.
6. Construct a roadmap for the paper.

Here is a color-coded sample introduction that demonstrates the steps listed above:

**Are cows responsible for climate change?** A recent study (United Nations, 2018) indicated that the manure and belching from cattle generates significant amounts of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) that warms the planet. According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA, 2017), the earth cannot sustain a continued increase in temperature without significant and potentially unprecedented impact on humans. Scientists have sounded the alarm on the need for developing more climate-friendly food since the 1980s. Food Navigator USA (2020) reports that plant-based meats continue to gain in popularity, in part because they provide carbon-friendly alternatives. Plant-based meat will help to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and mitigate climate disaster. This paper includes a discussion of the harms of industrial animal agriculture and the environmental benefits of plant-based food.

Even though the introduction is the first paragraph or paragraphs of your paper, it does not have to be the first thing you write. Sometimes people find it helpful to save the introduction for last because then they have a clearer idea of where the paper is going as they work to introduce it. That being said, crafting a clear introduction as you begin writing your paper can help keep you focused as you write. Also, as your paper evolves throughout the writing process, do not be afraid to revise your introduction to fit the new direction of the paper.

## How to Write a Body Paragraph

A body paragraph is almost like a mini paper of its own. Just like a paper, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and each sentence of the body paragraph works almost like the paragraphs in a paper do to present one clear point or idea: the topic of your paragraph. There are three steps to building a strong body paragraph:

**1. Write a topic sentence to introduce the point that will be the focus of the paragraph.**

Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that tells the reader what that paragraph will be about. Topic sentences basically act as a mini thesis for your paragraph, introducing the main idea of the paragraph clearly and concisely for the reader.

A good way to create unity in the paper is to use the topic sentence to clearly link the topic of the paragraph to the overall thesis of the paper. In fact, if you look at the thesis statement, topic sentences, and the first sentence of the conclusion of the paper, they should form a cohesive paragraph in themselves that summarizes the main points of the paper.

**2. Include supporting evidence that is sandwiched between your own ideas and commentary.**

As you present your paragraph's ideas, you should use supporting evidence from your outside sources to support what you are saying about the topic. This information can include paraphrased information or direct quotes, but direct quotes should be used only sparingly and should make up only a small part of your paper (15% or less of the paper as a whole). Remember that your ideas are what make the paper valuable to your reader. If the reader only wanted to see your sources' ideas, they could look up the sources for themselves. For this reason, you want to avoid being too source heavy in your paragraphs and include only outside evidence that serves to support the main point or argument you are making in paper.

This outside information should be incorporated using a sandwiching technique, ensuring that each piece of outside information is completely surrounded by your own words and ideas. Think of your supporting evidence as the meat in a sandwich, and your ideas make up the top and bottom bread, first introducing the outside information to prepare the reader for what is to come and then coming back to comment on why that information is relevant to the topic of the paragraph and the paper as a whole. While the meat of the sandwich is a strong component, without the bread, it falls apart, and your reader may not know how to approach it. Therefore, you want to act as a guide for the reader so that they do not have to assume why you included certain information or what it means to the overall point you are trying to make.

**3. Write a closing statement that wraps up the paragraph and transitions to your next point.**

Closing out the paragraph is important because it provides closure for the reader before they move on to the next paragraph and creates a link between this paragraph and the next so that the reader can clearly follow where the paper is going. You should avoid ending the paragraph with any cited material because you don't want to leave your reader wondering how that information relates to what you are saying. Let your voice be the dominant one in the paper and give your reader the clear guidance they need to navigate through your ideas.

To review, the three steps to writing a strong body paragraph are as follows:

1. **Write a topic sentence to introduce the point that will be the focus of the paragraph.**
2. **Include supporting evidence that is sandwiched between your own ideas and commentary.**
3. **Write a closing statement that wraps up the paragraph and transitions to your next point.**

Here is a color-coded sample body paragraph that demonstrates the steps listed above:

Plant-based food presents many environmental benefits when compared to food derived from industrial animal agriculture. One way that plant-based food can positively impact the environment is by lessening the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> released during food production. According to an article by Lynch et al. (2018), producing a kilogram of tofu from soybeans creates anywhere from four to sixty times less CO<sub>2</sub> than is created during the production of the same amount of beef. In other words, even at the lower limit, choosing to produce tofu instead of beef can reduce carbon emissions from food production by three quarters. Although plant-based food's largest impact is likely its carbon emissions, moving toward a plant-based diet can also impact other environmental areas like water consumption. In her *Stanford Report* article, Hunter (2021) explains that the industries producing meat and dairy products consume approximately a third of the amount of fresh water used worldwide. Switching to plant-based foods can therefore reduce this wasteful use of fresh water, leaving more of this resource to go around. With these environmental benefits in mind, it is clear that switching from animal-based to plant-based food has the potential to mitigate climate disaster by reducing the food industries' impacts on the environment.

## How to Write a Conclusion

Although conclusions can sometimes feel like an afterthought since the majority of the paper's ideas have already been covered by this point, a conclusion can make or break a strong paper. By finishing the paper strong, you can really hammer home the ideas you have spent an entire paper building up for the reader, but if you just throw something together, you can leave the reader wondering, "so what?" There are two main steps to writing a strong conclusion paragraph:

- 1. Sum up the main points of your paper as a recap for the reader.**

Especially in longer papers, the reader may forget what they may have read in the beginning of the paper by the time they make it to the conclusion, so it is important to provide a review of the most important points you have made to begin the conclusion. While you do want to provide a recap of the main ideas of the paper, you do not want to repeat these ideas in the same words that you have already used within the paper because it can cause the reader to lose interest as they perceive the repeated language as redundant.

- 2. Close out the paper by explaining the significance of what you have said.**

As stated above, when readers reach the end of a paper, they often find themselves wondering why they should care or "so what?" Answering this "so what?" question is one of the most important parts of your paper because it reinforces the relevance and significance of your paper's main idea. Think about your audience, people within your field, and explain why the points and/or argument of your paper are important to them.

To review, the three steps to writing a strong conclusion are as follows:

- 1. Sum up the main points of your paper as a recap for the reader.**

- 2. Close out the paper by explaining the significance of what you have said.**

Here is a color-coded sample conclusion that demonstrates the steps listed above:

If people can make the switch to plant-based meat substitutes, they can not only benefit the environment, but they could also help prevent a future climate crisis. Although today's world bases much of its diet on meat products, industrial animal agriculture presents many environmental dangers including increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, habitat destruction, and excess water usage. Plant-based meat alternatives eliminate those issues completely, benefiting the environment over time by reducing the agriculture industry's carbon footprint and reducing the wasteful use of fresh water. As the world grows ever closer to climate disaster, making the shift to more sustainable and environmentally conscious options in all areas of life becomes more and more important. If people want to continue to inhabit this planet, they must make changes to their personal behaviors to sustain the Earth for themselves and future generations.