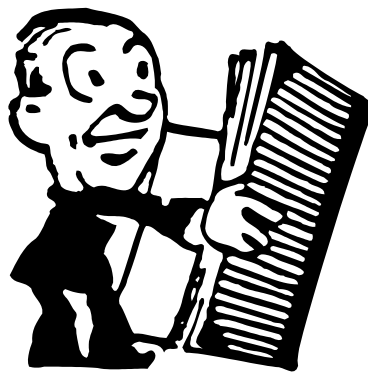


# Thesis Statements and Introductions



**The Tutoring Center  
Bucks County Community College**

## ***Introductions***

### **Purpose**

Not only does the introduction contain your thesis statement, but it provides the initial impression of your argument, your writing style, and the overall quality of your work. A clear, concise, well-organized, and engaging introduction will help to efficiently set-up your paper. The introduction must captivate your audience's attention and interest. Otherwise, the audience may not be convinced to continue reading. Think about a text that you have read or even a movie that you have seen whose beginning lost your interest. You probably put down the book or changed the channel.

Your introduction also serves as a preview for the remainder of your paper, conveying necessary background information to your readers, identifying your topic and its significance, and unveiling how you will organize your essay. An effective introduction also establishes your voice as a writer and your point of view towards your topic. For a thesis-driven paper, provide an overview of your basic argument and why you will attempt to convince your reader of your stance on a particular issue. If your paper deviates from the general outline suggested in the introduction, then consider reworking the introduction ([http://www.english.ucla.edu/TA/hyperteach/PDFs/good\\_intro.pdf](http://www.english.ucla.edu/TA/hyperteach/PDFs/good_intro.pdf)).

### **Content**

The introduction must include the following:

- Necessary background information\*
- Brief explanation of any terms unfamiliar to your audience
- Identification of the novel, short story, play, poem, etc. (literary analysis paper, research paper on a literary subject)
  - Always provide the title and author of a text in the introduction of a literary analysis paper.
- Identification of primary characters, if applicable (literary analysis paper, research paper on a literary subject)
- Thesis statement (except for a narrative)

\*If there is considerable background information, it is acceptable to include a paragraph immediately following the introduction that includes this information.

The **content, style, and organization** of your introduction will shift depending on your essay's genre.

- Research paper, argumentative paper—background on your topic/context; thesis statement; overview of your paper's organization
- Literary analysis paper—author, title of work(s) you will discuss, thesis statement; any relevant background information; overview of your paper's organization
- Narrative—setting (time and place); narrative hook; emphasis on voice; no thesis statement

### **Organization**

An introduction's logical organization can be compared to the image of a funnel. That is, the introduction usually begins with a general overview of your topic and then becomes more specific, narrowing to the thesis statement. Typically, the thesis statement is the last sentence in the introduction. It may, however, come *near* the end of the introduction. The thesis statement may also be more than one sentence, particularly in longer papers.

### **Avoid these pitfalls when composing an introduction:**

- Dictionary definitions:  
While you should explain any terms that your audience needs to know to understand your paper's content, avoid beginning a paper with a dictionary definition such as the following: "Webster's Dictionary defines "joy" as "great pleasure or happiness." This approach to an introduction is cliché.
- Overuse of facts without rendering an opinion or any analysis:  
Implementing too many facts will produce a dry, lifeless introduction and will overshadow your own voice as a writer.
- Repetition of similar ideas:  
Your audience will notice that you are not saying anything new or fresh.

## **Types of Introductions**

### ***Analogy***

Make a comparison that will catch your reader's attention and introduce your topic.

Imagine that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is presented with a series of studies testing the effectiveness of a new drug. There are some laboratory tests that produce fairly consistent positive effects, but the drug does not always work as expected and no attempt has been made to discover why. Most of the clinical tests are negative; there are also a few weak positive results and a few results suggesting that the drug is less effective than a placebo. Obviously the FDA would reject this application, yet the widely accepted evidence that watching television violence causes aggression is no more adequate.

Jonathan L. Freedman, "Violence in the Mass Media and Violence in Society: The Link is Unproven," excerpt from *The Aims of Argument*"

### ***Allusion***

Make a reference to another literary work, person, or event.

Four decades ago Betty Friedan, in her groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*, wrote about women who suffer "a problem that had no name." They were sick and tired of being sick and tired of having no identity to call their own: The problem is always being the children's mommy, or the minister's wife, and never being myself. One woman described her situation as living in a "comfortable concentration camp."

There's a new problem without a name now and it's a mare of another color. Women are complaining about work and writing about it. Elizabeth Perle McKenna left a high-powered position in publishing to search for the neglected parts of her life. In writing *When Work Doesn't Work Anymore*, she found lots of baby boomers like herself who had bought into what they call the New Oppression – hard earned success. The symptoms include burnout, boredom and lack of balance.

Suzanne Fields, "Mission No Longer Impossible—Or Is It?"  
-Excerpt from *The Aims of Argument*"

**Anecdote (or Narration)**

Start with a brief story that is closely related to your topic.

I was out to drinks with a man I'd recently met. "I'll take care of that," he said, sweeping up the check, and as he said it, I felt a warm glow of security, as if everything in my life was suddenly going to be taken care of. As the pink cosmopolitans glided smoothly across the bar, I thought for a moment of how nice it would be to live in an era when men always took care of the cosmopolitans. I pictured a lawyer with a creamy leather briefcase going off to work in the mornings and coming back home in the evenings to the townhouse he has bought for me, where I have been ordering flowers, soaking in the bath, reading a nineteenth-century novel, and working idly on my next book. This fantasy of Man in a Gray Flannel Suit is one that independent, strong-minded women of the nineties are distinctly not supposed to have, but I find myself having it all the same. And many of the women I know are having it also.

Katie Roiphe, "The Independent Woman (and Other Lies)," excerpt from *Esquire*

**Description**

Write a detailed description to illustrate a specific point about your topic.

To the causal eye, Green Valley, Nevada, a corporate master-planned community just south of Las Vegas, would appear to be a pleasant place to live. On a Sunday last April—a week before the riots in Los Angeles and related disturbances in Las Vegas—the golf carts were lined up three abreast at the up-scale "Legacy" course; people in golf outfits on the clubhouse veranda were eating three-cheese omelets and strawberry waffles and looking out over the palm trees and fairways, talking business and reading Sunday newspapers. In nearby Parkside Village, one of Green Valley's thirty-five developments, a few homeowners washed cars or boats or pulled up weeds in the sun. Cars wound slowly over clean broad streets, ferrying children to swimming pools and backyard barbecues and Cineplex matinees. At the Silver Springs tennis courts, a well-tanned teenage boy in tennis togs pummeled his sweating father. Two twelve-year-old daredevils on expensive mountain bikes, decked out in Chicago Bulls caps and matching tank tops, watched and ate chocolate candies.

David Guterson, "No Place Like Home: On the Manicured Streets of a Master-Planned Community," excerpt from *Seeing and Writing 3*

**Definition**

Provide an explanation, *not* a dictionary definition, of a term that your paper will cover.

The word "addiction" is often used loosely and wryly in conversation. People will refer to themselves as "mystery book addicts" or "cookie addicts." E.B. White wrote of his annual surge of interest in gardening: "We are hooked and are making an attempt to the kick the habit." Yet nobody really believes that reading mysteries or ordering seeds by catalogue is serious enough to be compared with addiction to heroin or alcohol. The word "addiction" is here used jokingly to denote a tendency to overindulge in some pleasurable activity.

Marie Winn, "TV Addiction: Cookies or Heroin?," excerpt from *The Macmillan Reader*

**Example**

Begin with an example of your topic.

When Andy Rooney got in trouble last month, gay activists complained he was being publicly rebuked for his allegedly racist remarks and not for his gay bashing. They wanted to know why homophobia was viewed as less serious than racism. The case of Martin Luther King III last week brought the comparison into even sharper relief. After a speech in Poughkeepsie, NY, in which he said “something must be wrong” with homosexuals, the young Atlanta politician met with angry gay leaders and quickly apologized. His father’s legacy, King said, was “the struggle to free this country of bigotry and discrimination.” In that light, he added, he needed to examine his own attitudes toward homosexuals.

Jonathan Alter, “Degrees of Discomfort,” excerpt from *The Aims of Argument*”

**Question**

Ask a question or series of questions regarding your topic. Do not include an entire paragraph of questions. And, remember to answer the question.

Are the brains of men and women different? If so, do men and women differ in abilities, talents, and deficiencies? A scientific answer to these questions could affect society and culture, and variously shock, intrigue, delight, depress, and reassure people of both sexes. Now an answer is coming into sight: Yes, male and female brains do differ.

Pamela Weintraub, “The Brain: His and Hers,” excerpt from *The Gender Reader*

**Quotation**

Start with a relevant quotation or an epigraph (quotation that appears at the beginning of an essay or literary analysis).

Example 1: Relevant Quotation

In 1858, John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote *The Idea of a University*. His ideal was a residential community of students and teachers devoted to the intellect. To him, a college was “an alma mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill.” Given a choice between an institution that dispensed with “residence and tutorial superintendence and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination in a wide range of subjects” or “a university which [...] merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years,” he chose the latter.

But that ideal is moribund today. Except for a relatively small number of residential liberal arts colleges, institutions of higher education and their students are moving away from it at an accelerating pace. The notion of a living-learning community is dead or dying on most campuses today.

Arthur Levine and Jeanette S. Cureton, “Collegiate Life: An Obituary,” excerpt from *The Aims of Argument*

## Example 2: Epigraph

Turning and turning in the widening gyre<sup>1</sup>  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

-From W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

The rock path begins to look smooth under my sneakers as I increase my pace. The heavy backpack is weighing me down, but I push forward. My dorm seems farther away than usual. Rounding the corner, I spot the square plot of gravel that is the makeshift parking lot for the dorms on the north side of campus; there is no sign of my mother's car. *Where could they possibly be?* As I wave my identification card in front of the black censor at the entrance of my dorm, I hear someone yell my name. "Chiazor!" I turn in the direction of the cement athletic center. Parked in front of the gym is my mother's small black car, and standing in front of her car are my uncle and aunt. I throw off the bulky backpack and dash towards them.

Chiazor Okagbue, "The Uncertainty," *Fresh Ink*, 59

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<sup>1</sup>gyre—a circular or spiral form; a circular or spiral motion, especially an ocean current

### ***Statistics***

Provide a statistic or statistics to open your discussion and to give a concrete example that illuminates your topic.

The decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic, unexpected, and extraordinary social trends of our time. Its dimensions can be captured in a single statistic: in just three decades, between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent. By the turn of the century, nearly 50 percent of American children may be going to sleep each evening without being able to say good night to their dads.

David Popenoe, "A World Without Fathers,"  
excerpt from *Wilson Quarterly*

## ***Thesis Statements***

The thesis statement establishes the overall point of your essay, and it fulfills two main objectives. First, the thesis must *state your topic*. Second, the thesis must convey *what you will prove about your topic* (your opinion about that topic). The thesis statement is most often embedded in the introductory paragraph, usually at the end of that paragraph.

According to the *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*, the basic requirements for a thesis statement include the following:

- the essay's subject—the topic that you discuss
- the essay's purpose—either informative or persuasive
- your focus—the assertion that presents your point of view
- specific language—not vague words
- brief overview of the topic's subdivisions

Troyka and Hesse 45

### ***Try this strategy to develop and narrow a thesis statement.***

To write an effective thesis statement, start with a general idea and then sharpen your focus.

**Step 1:** Choose a topic, e.g., the film, *Pulp Fiction*

**Step 2:** Focus the topic, e.g., excessive violence in *Pulp Fiction*

**Step 3:** Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question.

E.g., Why does Quentin Tarantino employ excessive violence in *Pulp Fiction*?

**Step 4:** Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement.

E.g., In the film *Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino uses excessive violence to mock American social and cultural values.

Your thesis statement should be clear and direct and should entice your audience to read further. Each subsequent paragraph in the body of your paper should support your thesis statement and prove your claim.

### ***Review these examples that detail two types of thesis statements.***

1. An **argumentative thesis statement** will:

1. state your main claim, which is debatable (or arguable)
2. the reasons/evidence that support this claim
3. the order in which you will present your support (organization)

Example: Barn owls' nests should not be eliminated from barns because barn owls help farmers by eliminating insects and rodent pests.

This thesis is argumentative because it makes a claim about an issue that is debatable. Further, this thesis is effective because it specifically states why the barn owls should not be banned. That is, the owls eliminate insects and rodent pests, thereby helping farmers.

2. An **informative (or expository) thesis statement** will:

1. state what you are going to explain
2. outline the organization of your explanation

Example: The lifestyles of barn owls include hunting for insects and animals, building nests, and raising their young.

This thesis is informative because it establishes that the paper will provide information on the lifestyles of barn owls. This thesis does not take a stand or make a claim that needs to be proved.

This thesis statement is also an example of using **subdivisions**. The subdivisions for this thesis statement are:

1. *hunting for insects and animals*
2. *building nests*
3. *raising their young*

Each category is a separate subdivision, which will each be a separate paragraph (if not more).

### ***Nine Errors to Avoid When Composing a Thesis***

Often students fall into common “traps” when writing thesis statements. These examples illustrate how to shape a clear and effective thesis statement.

1. **A thesis cannot be a fragment; it must express a complete thought.**

**Unacceptable:** how students learn to write

**Acceptable:** The best means for teaching students to write is to have them focus on the steps of the writing process rather than the end product.

2. **A thesis must not be worded as a question. (Sometimes the answer to the question can be the thesis.)**

**Unacceptable:** Do Americans really need large refrigerators?

**Acceptable:** If Americans did their marketing daily, as do some Europeans, they could save energy and money because they could use smaller refrigerators.

3. **A thesis must not be too broad.**

**Unacceptable:** The literature of mythology contains many journeys.

**Acceptable:** In Greek mythology, the motif of the journey represents the internal struggles and eventual perseverance of mortals.



4. **A thesis should not contain unrelated elements.**

**Unacceptable:** All novelists seek the truth, and some novelists are good psychologists.

**Acceptable:** In their attempt to probe human nature, many novelists strive to reveal the intricacies of human relations.

5. **\*\*\*A thesis should not contain phrases like “I think” or “in my opinion” because they weaken the writer’s argument.**

**Unacceptable:** In my opinion, all cigarette smoking in public places should be banned because of the adverse effects of “passive smoking” on non-smokers.

**Acceptable:** All cigarette smoking in public places should be banned because of the adverse effects of “passive smoking” on non-smokers.

6. **A thesis should not be expressed in vague language.**

**Unacceptable:** Religion as part of the school curriculum should be avoided because it can cause trouble.

**Acceptable:** Religion should not be part of the public school curriculum because it is a highly personal commitment and can cause conflict with those who hold alternative beliefs.

7. **A thesis must not be expressed in muddled or incoherent language.**

**Unacceptable:** Homosexuality is a “status” offence to the effect that the participants are willing so that the relationship is voluntary in character rather than the type described in a “victim-perpetrator” model.

**Acceptable:** Homosexuality between two consenting adults should be considered as alternate life style rather than a crime.

8. **A thesis should not be expressed in figurative language (symbolic in any way).**

**Unacceptable:** The amazons of today are trying to purge all the stag words from the English language.

**Acceptable:** Today’s feminists are trying to eliminate the use of sexually-biased words from public use.

9. **A thesis should not simply state a fact.**

**Unacceptable:** Women have been repressed at different times and in different cultures.

**Acceptable:** The repression of women writers in America during the nineteenth century contributed to the idea that there were relatively few writers worthy enough to be included in anthologies.

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