WRITING INTRODUCTIONS

There are many different pieces of information you might include in your introduction, depending on what your purpose is. Some writers write the introduction first, so that its focus will guide the rest of the paper. Other writers write the introduction last, so that they will know exactly what they need to include for preparing the reader for their topic.

Most introductions include both a lead and a thesis statement.

A. Lead

The purpose of the lead, or opening, is to arouse the interest of the reader, to indicate the writer’s perspective on the topic, and to show the direction the writer intends to take with the material.

Examples of types of leads (choose according to what is appropriate to your field and topic):

1. Quotation:
   “Live and let die.” Has this become the official motto of American youth?
2. Broad or Startling Statement:
   Despite the desperate attempts of anti-smoking coalitions, teenage smoking has only become worse in the last five years.
3. Statistic:
   According to the Surgeon General, over _% of all teenagers between the ages of 13 and 15 have tried a cigarette. _% of those kids have become regular smokers.
4. Question:
   Why do teenagers smoke, despite how much they know about the health risks?
5. Anecdote:
   7-11 clerk Bob was sure the guy was over 18 years old; he had a mustache and a world-weary look about him. Now Bob only wishes he could turn the clock back to that moment and say, “May I see your ID please?” By selling the 16-year-old a pack of cigarettes, Bob sent his own life into a spiral downward.

B. Thesis Statement

A thesis statement includes the major points to be covered (what the essay will use to prove, illustrate, describe, and defend this statement). Generally, the thesis statement will be the last sentence of the introduction. A well-developed thesis statement considers the following aspects of the paper:

- The objective or purpose of the paper,
- The main idea of the paper,
- The writer’s position on the topic,
- The scope of the essay,
- The method and/or organization of the support.

Also see the “Writing a Good Thesis Statement” handout.
C. Other Possible Aspects of an Introduction

In order what to choose what to include in your essay, ask yourself questions like, “What would I like my reader to know before I explain what I found? Or “What does my reader need to know to understand my paper?”

✓ **Background information:** Is there any information your reader needs to know about your topic before you start your major points?

✓ **Summary of previous arguments:** You might want to start with a brief review of what other writers have written on the subject.

✓ **Definitions:** Are there any terms or concepts that need to be explained?

✓ **Qualifications/Limitations:** If there is a lot of controversy surrounding your topic, you might want to admit to the limitations of your topic or qualify your thesis by separating it from certain elements of the topic, for instance, if you want to qualify your argument by telling your reader up front that you are not going to deal with certain belief-oriented perspectives on the topic.

**Introduction structure:** Most introductions move from general to specific. The most specific “moment” is the thesis statement, which tends to come at the end of the introduction. Everything before it should lead to that thesis statement.

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**Lead in - can be general or very specific, but should always grab the reader and establish the topic:**

Ex: Sheila was a loving dog. She greeted strangers at the door with tail wagging, slept on the four-year-old’s bed, wrestled with the one-year-old, and never once growled or bit anyone. One would never imagine that Sheila was a pit bull.

**General background on topic:**

Pit bulls have been the subject of controversy since illegal dog fighting gained popularity in the 1980’s, leading to a rise in the breeding and aggressive training of this breed. This has led both to legislation trying to eradicate this breed altogether, and a great deal of animosity and suspicion toward all pit bulls.

**Set up for thesis (providing justification for topic):**

The violence of this breed is dependent on the training the dogs receive. Pit bulls, trained with gentle hands, can be as child-friendly and safe as golden retrievers.

**Thesis:**

Pit bulls, as a whole breed, should not be vilified. If our humane societies and ASPCAs expand their education about proper training practices and place a tighter lock down on illegal dog fighting, this breed can survive and gain a new reputation.