

FROM BEGINNING TO END: INTRODUCTIONS

When writing papers, many people find that it's hard to get started... and hard to wrap things up. Introductions can often be the most difficult part of an essay: How do you get readers interested enough to read further? Although it may seem out-of-order, it's often best to write the introductory paragraphs of an essay **last**; after you know the final shape of your argument, you can decide on the best way to get your readers' attention.

A successful introduction will include the following:

- **A hook**, or an attention-getting device: What can I write in the first few sentences that will make the reader want to continue reading the essay?

Some possible types of attention-getters:

- A startling or intriguing fact or statistic
- A short but important quotation
- An anecdote (hypothetical or real)
- A brief historical background of the issue

NOTE: Steer clear of the ever-popular beginning, "Webster's dictionary defines 'democracy' [or 'gender' or 'film noir'] as..." This introduction not only is a cliché but also rarely provides your readers with any information they didn't already know.

- **Background information:** Much like the exposition of a work of fiction, an introduction should provide all necessary background information. It should also define key terms and clarify the premise for your thesis.
- **The question at issue:** What is the purpose of your essay? Explain whether you are examining a question of fact, definition, value, or policy.

FACT:

A question of fact asks, "Did something happen or not? Is this true or is it not?"

DEFINITION:

A question of definition asks, "What is the nature of this term (or issue or text)? Does this term (or issue or text) fit into a certain category?"

VALUE:

A question of value asks, "What is the worth [moral, practical, feasible, comparative] of this term (or text or issue)?"

POLICY:

A question of policy asks, "What are we to do with the information about this term or issue?"

- **Thesis:** Your thesis statement should be an answer—at least a preliminary one—to your question at issue. Your thesis should take a stand and make a clear and specific argument.
- **Preview of Organization:** A good essay should not surprise the reader as it progresses. Your introduction should not only include your proofs, but should allude to a logical ordering of the argument. For example, proofs are often ordered by importance, ending with the most important point.