



Introductions¹ (Humanities Papers)

According to *The Allyn & Bacon Handbook* (for writers), an introduction to a paper should be a “type of transition” that moves readers “from the world outside of your paper to the world within” (Rosen and Behrens 138-139). In simple, concrete terms, an introduction is a paragraph or a series of paragraphs that engage your readers and tell them what you’re writing about.

A tip on process: Writers don’t always begin a writing project by composing an introduction. Instead, consider beginning with some preliminary statements, and then move into the body of your paper. Because a critical part of a writing process is figuring out what you want to say about a specific topic, you often will not know what consequential point you want to make until you write a draft or two of your paper. Use the writing process to help you discover your focus and thesis. Once you have a better sense of your focus and thesis, return to your preliminary statements and revise them into a more formal introduction.

In a humanities essay, a strong introduction does most or all of the following:

1. engages the reader’s attention
2. identifies for a reader the essay’s critical question/focused topic
3. provides background information necessary to help readers understand the scope of the topic
4. explains why that critical question/topic matters
5. suggests the writer’s answer to that question in the form of a thesis statement
6. outlines a method of approach for exploring the question/topic

The Funnel: Introductions may often be likened to funnels in that they tend to move from general to specific, with your thesis statement being the most specific statement you make in the introduction.

Sample Funnel Introduction for a Humanities Essay:

Communicating with a partner is like ballroom dancing: both require plenty of back-and-forth as communicators and dancers try to get it right, and as the conversation and dance steps may, at times, be difficult. In the case of heterosexual relationships, communication difficulties between men and women are largely due to differences in men and women’s communication styles, according to Deborah Tannen. In “Sex, Lies, and Conversation,” Tannen analyzes the differences between men and women’s communication styles and offers suggestions for negotiating the misunderstandings that may crop up in relationships as a result of those differences. While Tannen’s observations may be true for some couples, her essay relies too heavily on generalities and stereotypes to be seriously helpful to couples coping with major communication difficulties.

Useful beginnings are simple and direct without being trite. See the examples below:

A direct statement of fact: “I underwent, during the summer I became fourteen, a profound religious crisis.”—James Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind”

A statement intended to startle readers with its bluntness or frankness: “Lie detectors lie.”—Jonathan Kwitney, “The Dirty Little Secrets of Lie Detectors”

A question or a series of questions: “How does the mind work? To answer that question, we must look at some of the work performed by the mind.” – Noam Chomsky, “Language and the Mind”

A specific image: “A scab-handed, wandering child who rode off on old horses named Snip and Moon, I grew up with the constant, thronging presence of animals. Herds of feral hogs inhabited the swampland tule beds where the waterbirds nested. These hogs would eat the downy young of the Canada geese if they could, but never caught them so far as I knew.”—William Kittrege, “Second Chance at Paradise”

An authentic, illustrative anecdote: “Someone said recently to an old black lady from Mississippi, whose legs had been badly mangled by local police who arrested her for ‘disturbing the peace,’ that the civil rights movement was dead, and asked, since it was dead, what she thought about it. The old lady replied, hobbling out of his presence on her cane, that the civil rights movement was like her self: ‘If it’s dead, it shore ain’t ready to lay down!’” —Alice Walker, “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?”

Introductions¹ (Scientific Papers)

Like introductions for humanities papers, introductions for scientific papers also transition readers into the world of a writer's paper. Unlike humanities introductions, which often introduce an argument about an idea or a text in the form of a thesis statement assertion, scientific introductions are more focused on describing for readers the research goals that have been addressed by the research project in question.

In a scientific research paper, a strong introduction does most or all of the following:

1. provides the research context for the problem/question being addressed
2. states how the writer's own research will fill in the missing bricks in the wall of research already done on this topic
3. explains how and why this research is important
4. gives some sense of the paper's overall organization

The Funnel (see reverse) can also be used as a model for scientific introductions.

Sample Funnel Introduction for a Scientific Paper:

Our laboratory has been involved in the analysis of the HLA class II genes and their association with autoimmune disorders such as insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus. As part of this work, the laboratory handles a large number of blood samples. In an effort to minimize the expense and urgency of transportation of frozen or liquid blood samples, we have designed a protocol that will preserve the integrity of lymphocyte DNA and enable the transport and storage of samples at ambient temperatures. Although very good results have been obtained using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplification of DNA extracted from dried blood spots on filter paper (1,4,5,8,9), this preservation method yields limited amounts of DNA and is susceptible to contamination. As an alternative, we have been investigating the use of lyophilization ("freeze-drying") of whole blood as a method to preserve sufficient amounts of genomic DNA to perform PCR and Southern Blot analysis. In this report, we summarize our analysis of genomic DNA extracted from lyophilized whole blood (Torrance, MacLeod & Hache, p. 64).

Useful scientific introductions are neither too broad nor too narrow in approach:

While it is not advisable to overwhelm readers by relating your research field's entire history, you do need to provide readers with enough information about your project so that they can understand the importance of your research even if they are not experts in that area.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you're revising your introduction:

- Have I explained the theory or model I am addressing?
- Have I related the research problem to that theory?
- Have I introduced known facts that support or do not match up with the theory and then suggested explanations for any discrepancies?
- Have I stated the problem in specific terms?
- Have I ordered my information in a step-by-step, logical fashion?

Rosen, Leonard J., and Laurence Behrens. *The Allen and Bacon Handbook*. 5th ed. United States: Longman, 2003. Print.

¹Examples adapted from The George Mason University Writing Center and The Writing Center at Colorado State University.