

## What is an Introduction?

The first paragraph of your academic work. It creates the first impression of the work. This first impression may relate to the content, the topic(s), background information relating to the topic(s), the central argument(s), the theoretical framework(s), and/or the writing style.

“In theatrical productions, there is a process called *setting the scene*, which is the act of describing a situation so that the audience understands what is happening. Setting the scene lays the groundwork for what to expect during the remaining acts in the production. Similarly, a well-written introduction in a [...] paper sets the scene for the reader. It starts by telling the reader what is happening or has happened (the context), and ends by giving the reader a glimpse of what follows in the remainder of the article (the plot)”

- Thomas M. Annesley, “‘It was a cold and rainy night’:  
Set the Scene with a Good Introduction”, *Clinical  
Chemistry*, vol. 56, no. 5, 2010, pp. 708-713.

## Introduction Structure

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1. State your task: what is your work about?
  2. Background information: what is known about this topic?
  3. Outline: what are the main points you cover?
  4. Thesis statement: what is your central argument?

**TIP 1:** Introductions are often more general at the beginning, then we narrow our focus, and then we are very specific near the end. Remember, this structure is only a recommendation.

**TIP 2:** It is better if your introduction reads like a “kitchen recipe”, rather than a “murder mystery”, i.e. present your thesis/ key findings clearly, and do not leave your reader guessing.

### Example: Essay Introduction

In her work on the function and popularity of blackface as a nineteenth-century entertainment, Alice Maurice argues that blackface presents “multiple forms of identity exchange”, and that what “is on display here is the endless exchange itself, the ecstatic spectacle of the individual dissolving into the mass” (Maurice 218). As Maurice suggests, identity is becomes exchangeable when it is represented through the de-familiarising and alienating strategies of blackface. Using Maurice’s argument about the marketability of identity as a theoretical framework, this essay analyses representations of racial identity in the melodramatic adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The essay examines the theme of dislocation, the image of the commodified human body, as well as the characters’ proclivity for religious rhetoric. Through an analysis of each of these points, the essay argues that both African-American and Caucasian identities are presented in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as performative constructs, which are shaped by the cultural dominance of mid-century American capitalism and exchange.

1. States the task of the essay, i.e. what this essay is about.

2. Provides background information about the topic using research, i.e. tells us what is known about this topic.

3. Provides an outline/ a “road map” of the main points covered in the essay.

4. Provides a thesis statement, i.e. argument.

– Leanne Waters, “Blackface Minstrelsy and The Destabilisation of Racial Identity in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, Undergraduate Essay, UCD, 2008.

**TIP 3:** You will notice that the example above uses the Page 1 recommendations out of order. Remember, you do not have to adhere to a strict chronology; these are recommendations