

Writing an introduction

A good introduction should be clear and well structured, and it should make a good first impression.

CLARITY - A good, effective introduction is like a roadmap or plan of your essay - it tells the readers where you are taking them, usually by stating what the essay is about, what your position or thesis is, and how you will go about organising your essay and supporting your thesis with evidence. It is important that you clearly state your main topic and identify the points that you are going to raise, so that the introduction makes sense to your reader and doesn't leave him/her guessing. It would be a good idea to ask a friend to read your introduction – even if they don't know your subject, they should be able to understand what your essay will discuss, what argument you are making, what evidence you will provide, and generally how your essay will be organised. If they can't say that after reading your introduction, you need to make some changes.

FIRST IMPRESSION - Your tutor or lecturer will often have to read and grade a lot of essays written on the same topic. Capturing his or her interest from the start will stimulate their interest in your paper. Being clear, focused and specific in your introduction will help to guide them through, but it might also help to start the essay with some interesting quotation on the topic, or some thought-provoking question. It is also important to leave the impression that you are confident about your paper – if you use general and vague sentences in your introduction, you might leave the impression that you are not sure where you are going. Try to be as specific as you can.

STRUCTURE – Some assignment questions might guide your structure with a few instructions or sub-questions. For example, this question: *'Analyse the role of the nurse in managing patients with anorexia. Give a short description of anorexia and an overview of physiological signs that a nurse must be able to recognize and assist with. Then focus your discussion on the role of the nurse as one of the following: educator, family counsellor, role model, team coordinator or support person.'* The way the lecturer set this question gives clear direction (you are

asked to provide more specific information in the first part, while the second part requires a different approach). However, some questions are broader and less prescriptive, for example this one: '*Discuss the function of dialogue between men and women in one of Hemingway's short stories*'.

Even though these two questions are different, each one is asking you to make an argument (your own position or your point of view) about the *role* of the nurse, or about the *function* of dialogue. It would be a good idea to start with 'a bigger picture' and then narrow it down to specific points that you will argue. For example, take the Hemingway question – you might start with a sentence on Hemingway's ear for dialogue and his use of dialogue in general, before you narrow it down to how Hemingway develops *dialogue between men and women*. You might then address the particular story that you are going to analyse, state your thesis and list the points you are going to cover. Imagine your introduction as a funnel – you move from the broad to the more detailed and specific.

What to avoid in your introduction:

- General and vague sentences that don't say much ('Hemingway is an excellent writer whose writing style is very effective.')
- Sentences that don't add anything useful to your topic, or sentences not directly linked to your topic ('People have always engaged in conversation with one another, and it is important to see this reflected in a short story. All good writers use dialogue. Writers usually listen to how people talk to get ideas for writing dialogue.')
- Sentences that are factual report (unless it is required in your assignment description) ('Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899. He wrote nine novels and many short stories. His story 'Hills Like White Elephants', published in 1927 in a magazine and then republished the same year, focuses on a conversation between a man and a woman.')
- Sentences that simply restate the question ('Dialogue is a narrative technique that can have an important function in a short story. For example, dialogue has an important function in Hemingway's short stories, especially dialogue between men and women.')