

Hi, My Name Is: Introductions

Introductions are like general education requirements: they come before you really know what's going on, and a bad one can ruin your GPA. Also like Gen Eds, introductions seem easy, but can actually be quite hard. Have no fear! An introduction can be the most fun and rewarding part of a history paper, if you know what you are doing.

What does an introduction do, anyway? An standard introduction draws in the reader, establishes the paper's topic, and explains the writer's argument. An excellent introduction goes further: it makes a reader think they have already read the paper!

I'm about to start my paper. Should I begin writing with the introduction? Probably not. While it might seem counterintuitive, *introductions should be written last*. If you write the introduction last, your argument won't change in the middle of the paper. To avoid those sorts of inconsistencies, consider writing the paper first and checking back here after you are done.

OK. I've written my paper. How should I start my introduction? As they say, there are no wrong ways to skin a cat. (The History Lab does not condone the skinning of cats.) Same with introductions. Nonetheless, here are some ways to begin your paper:

- Describe a historical event: This is a chance to put your creative writing skills to work. Some of the best history writing begins with a rich description of a historic moment.
- Introduce a quotation from a historical text: You can never go wrong with a juicy quotation. Plus, doing so shows that you have undertaken primary research.
- Discuss a current event: There is nothing wrong with tying your work to an election, a war, or a World Series. Just make sure the two have more than your paper in common.
- Provide a personal anecdote: An anecdote will not only make your paper appear unique and original, but also suggest that the historical topic to be discussed has current relevance.

I found a nice quotation. Now, I discuss my argument? Not quite. The reader needs some context first. Inform the reader about where and when an event happened or a quotation was said. Think of this sentence (or these sentences) as building towards your argument.

How about now? Can I introduce my argument now? Yep! If you introduce your argument without context, the reader will wonder what you're talking about. If you provide the argument before you gain the audience's attention, you... well, I think you can imagine what will happen.

Should I prove that my argument is correct? Yes, you should, but not in your introduction. That is what the body paragraphs are for.