INTRODUCTIONS AND MAIN POINTS

The introductory sentences or paragraphs should signal to the reader: you are reading an analytical essay. Here are some conventional features of introductions and main points.

**CONTEXT**

The introduction should provide a context for the main point. It can embrace a few sentences or more than one paragraph, depending on the length of the paper.

The first sentence should be directly related to the major point that the writer wants to develop eventually, even if the first sentences tell a story or offer an illustration or definition. The first few sentences should not begin on such a level of generality that the reader has to skip quite a bit of distance to "get to the main point."

Working from his or her topic and purpose, a writer has to try to indicate the line of her thinking in an introduction, perhaps without losing the sense of promise or development that arouses a reader's interest. In other words, the introduction should generalize about the argument which will soon follow. Leave the specifying for later.

The "context" that surrounds and helps to build up a main point could include any of the following, depending on the writer's topic and purpose:

- establishing the topic and a response to the topic
- describing a brief background of events, terms
- offering an illustration or story or personal reflection
- offering facts or quotations
- asking questions and suggest answers
- providing a series of contrasts to the main point
- offering one dramatic generalization, then move to explain its logic in a fuller paragraph

**ANALYTICAL THESIS**

The main point can be expressed in one or several sentences. It should grow out of the introductory context.

More important than this, the main point should go beyond a summary or description of ideas to offer an interpretation (analysis) of ideas. Main points don't just declare or state facts; they offer reasons why the writer thinks something about these facts or statements. If the writer offers a strong stance on the facts, then the essay becomes more openly argumentative.

*(over)*
INTRODUCTIONS AND MAIN POINTS (continued)

RELATIONSHIP TO THE WHOLE ESSAY

The introduction should have a clear relation to the paper's body and conclusion.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE PERSUASIVENESS OF A MAIN POINT

Here are some questions to ask of your introduction:

• How far away from the main point is the set of sentences?
• Is the introduction too abrupt; or too long?
• If an anecdote is used, does this personal story illustrate the main point very clearly?
• Is the main point developed in one or several sentences? Do these sentences connect?
• Are there general or "big" words that need to be defined?
• Are too many specialized words used together?
• Are there too many ideas in one sentence: can some of them be separated?
• Does this main point describe an issue instead of analyzing it?
• How does the introduction compare with the conclusion? In length; in connection of ideas?
  Are the same ideas repeated again, or are they repeated in a new way, pushed further?
  Does the conclusion end abruptly?
• Are you satisfied?

THE PROCESS OF WRITING INTRODUCTIONS

The last important question to ask a writer is: how do you plan and when do you write an introduction in the writing process? Some research suggests people write recursively, moving back and forth between ideas. Should you perfect the introduction without having written the body -- can you shuttle back and forth between the two? Can you write a reasonable introduction, write an outline for the paper, and then return to the introduction? Some writers begin with the conclusion and work backwards; others write the body and then supply the beginning and ending.