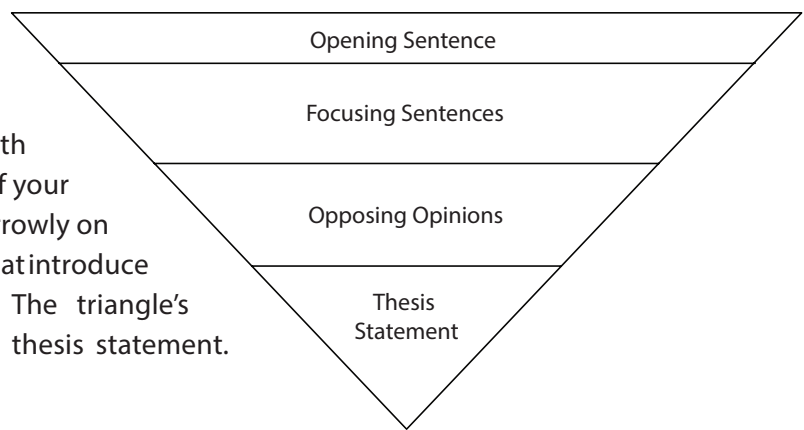


An introduction to an academic essay serves several important purposes:

- Presents readers with a basic idea of the essay's subject matter and purpose
- Gets readers' attention and prompts their interest in reading further
- Introduces your opinion regarding the facts being discussed
- Provides a road map to the arguments you will make to support your opinion
- Shows readers that you understand the subject and can discuss it clearly

A useful way to think about an introductory paragraph is to view it as an upside-down triangle. This shape represents the conceptual trajectory of the introduction, which starts out with a sentence that broadly introduces the subject of your essay, followed by sentences that focus more narrowly on your specific area of study. Next come sentences that introduce relevant opposing opinions on the subject. The triangle's point, at the bottom of the paragraph, is your thesis statement.



Opening Sentence

An opening sentence should give readers a general idea of the paper's subject matter, grab their interest, and set the tone of the writing (formal, informal, etc.).

Example

Pizza was brought to this country by Italian immigrants in the early 1900s and quickly became one of America's all-time favorite foods.

Note

Be careful not to write an opening sentence that is too general or too distant from the topic of the paper such as the following. "Since the dawn of time, human beings have sought out food that gives them both sustenance and pleasure." A sentence like this can be confusing and/or misleading for the reader.

Focusing Sentences

The two or three sentences that follow the opening sentence of the introduction are meant to give readers relevant background information on the subject and guide them toward the focal point of the paper.

Example

The new dish became popular so fast because it was both tasty and affordable. Whether it was good for you was another question, one that is still being debated today.

Sentences That Introduce Opposing Opinions

There are few, if any, subjects about which everyone agrees. At this point in your introduction, you should present the opposing opinions others have on the subject of your paper. Presenting the main controversy surrounding your subject is vital when you are writing an argumentative essay because it provides the framework for your upcoming thesis.

Example

While many nutritionists see pizza as a harmless food choice, others frown on the idea of consuming it too regularly, citing its high oil content and lack of nutritional value.

Note

Even if your subject is not particularly controversial, introducing others' opposing opinions gives your thesis context and links it to the outside world.

Thesis Statement

A thesis statement announces your own opinion or argument on the subject. The statement should also give readers an idea of the main points you will use to back up your argument and map out the order in which you will present them.

Example

However, despite arguments to the contrary, pizza can be an excellent meal choice because it is enticing, affordable, and healthy when enhanced with a choice of nutritious toppings.

Note

See handout on Thesis Statements for further details

Complete Introduction

The example sentences above can now be put together in the order shown in the upside down triangle to form a complete introduction.

Pizza was brought to this country by Italian immigrants in the early 1900s and quickly became one of America's all-time favorite foods. The new dish became popular so fast because it was both tasty and affordable. Whether it was good for you was another question, one that is still being debated today. While many nutritionists view pizza as a harmless food choice, others frown on the idea of consuming it too regularly, citing its high oil content and lack of nutritional value. However, despite arguments to the contrary, pizza can be an excellent meal choice because it is enticing, affordable, and healthy when enhanced with a choice of nutritious toppings.

Practice

Try writing an introduction for an assignment or on a topic of your choosing. Start by brainstorming, using the inverted triangle as a model. You can copy it onto another piece of paper and fill in each part with your own ideas.