



Introductions and Thesis Statements

Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

The introduction is usually the **first** paragraph of your essay, and it prepares an audience for your essay's topic and your position or argument on that topic. An introduction in an academic essay accomplishes the following goals:

1. establishes the direction of essay by providing a clear **thesis statement**
2. establishes a tone that remains consistent throughout essay
3. captures the attention of the readers and engages them

Thesis Statements and Introductions

A thesis statement is a sentence in your essay's introduction that tells the main argument you are making about your essay's topic. The thesis statement does more than just announce the essay's topic or make a factual statement. Rather, the thesis statement tells your reader what *your* particular position or view is about the topic. If people can disagree with your position or viewpoint, you probably have a thesis statement. Some examples include the following:

Non-thesis statement: This essay is about the TV show *ER* (topic).

Non-thesis statement: The TV show *ER* is set in a Chicago, IL urban hospital (fact).

Non-thesis statement: The TV show *ER* is about emergency room medicine (fact).

Thesis statement: The TV show *ER* depicts the world of emergency medicine *realistically and intensely*.

>>>>>This is a thesis statement because the words *realistically* and *intensely* are value words that show opinions or judgments. The author is making an argument that someone who has served in a real ER might strongly disagree with.

Extended thesis statement: The TV show *ER* depicts emergency medicine realistically and intensely by showing actual *trauma scenes, injured patients, medical procedures, and the stressful effects* of the job on doctors and nurses.

>>>>>This is an extended thesis statement which is a great organizational tool because it not only tells the author's view of the topic, but also it provides an overview of the entire essay's contents.

Non-thesis statement: I am going to write about the Beatles (topic).

Non-thesis statement: The Beatles were a musical group of the 1960's (fact).

Non-thesis statement: The Beatles wrote their own music and played instruments (fact).

Thesis statement: The Beatles were *the most influential* musical group *ever*. >>>>>This is a thesis statement because of the value judgment *most influential* and *ever*. Again, someone may disagree with this argument.

Extended Thesis statement: The Beatles were the most influential musical group ever because of their *lyrics, musical arrangements, influence on popular fashion, and influence on politics*.

>>>>>Again, notice how we get not only the author's opinion about the influence of the Beatles but also an overview of the rest of the essay's contents.

Special Notes for Introductions

1. This may seem obvious, but it isn't. One good strategy is to literally write out your essay's thesis statement and have it available in front of you (such as on an index card or on a bulletin board). This way you can constantly be reminded, in a very tangible way, of the purpose/position of your essay. Even if you are a seasoned writer, it is easy to get "lost" in your own essay and to forget why you are writing it and what your thesis statement is.
2. Avoid putting your thesis statement in the first sentence of your introduction. Work to provide some context/background information rather than assaulting your readers with your main claim right away. However, you don't want to wait too long to establish your essay's focus. State thesis statement by the end of your **first or second paragraph**. Some authors choose to use the first paragraph to create a scene/capture the reader's attention and then establish the thesis statement by the end of the second paragraph.
3. After your draft is written, read your introduction and your conclusion back-to-back without reading the body of the paper. Reading these two paragraphs right next to each other can show, clearly, if your essay has "drifted" from when you began.
4. Read conclusion for sense of direction. Interestingly, often times your ideas are more clearly expressed in the conclusion than in the introduction. The act of writing has allowed you to clarify and focus your thoughts. Always read your conclusion to see if you might be making your point more clearly there than in the introduction. If this is the case, substitute (and revise when necessary) your conclusion for your introduction.
5. Underline and then read each paragraph's topic (first) sentence. Does each paragraph "fit" with your introduction and thesis statement for your essay?
6. Keep in mind that with an extended thesis statement, you are creating categories for *sections* of your essay, not necessarily for each paragraph. For example, with the *ER* example, you might have three paragraphs about trauma scenes, two paragraphs about injured patients, three paragraphs about medical procedures, and five paragraphs about stressful effects on doctors and nurses.

Final Questions to Ask about Your Introduction

- Does your introduction capture your reader's attention?
- Does introduction contain the thesis statement of your essay?
- Does the introduction **avoid** putting the thesis statement in the very first sentence?
- Does the thesis statement appear **no later than** the end of the first or second paragraph?
- Does the introduction lead naturally into the body of the essay?
- Is the introduction consistent with the purpose, tone, and style of the rest of essay?
- Does the thesis statement avoid factual statements that just announce your topic?
- Is the thesis statement supported and illustrated by each paragraph's topic sentence?
- Is there a clear connection between the introduction and conclusion?