

An Academic Essay: The Opening Paragraph

A good introduction makes your paper more organized and your argument dive deeper, all while compelling the audience to read on. Here are some tips on starting your paper with a solid intro paragraph.

Make the Intro Your Paper's Road Map

- Clearly tell the reader what you are going to accomplish in your paper.
- Ideally, each main point of your argument should be distilled into a sentence.

How specific should I get?

Students often get paranoid about not letting on too much about their paper in the introduction.

But an intro should be as specific as possible while still keeping your paragraph succinct and clear.

You might introduce a main source text, offer an anecdote, and/or lay out your methodology for arriving at your thesis statement.

Opening sentence

Avoid any broad generalizations or boring, obvious statements.

Think about opening your intro with a stimulating quote or a crucial dilemma that you will work to solve.

Attention grabbing anecdotes, examples, or questions are fine, but just remember that you will need to transition between the opening sentence and your argument in just a sentence or two.

Thesis statement

Your thesis should be the conclusion you have reached in your analysis.

It should not tell readers what you are going to do, implore them to read on, or ask a question.

It should make a succinct, detailed, arguable **claim** that you will work to prove throughout your entire paper.

Process of writing

Although the introduction is the first thing your audience will read (besides your title), it doesn't have to be the first thing you write. The creation of your intro can mirror your drafting and revision process.

1. When you start devising your argument and laying out the movement of the first few paragraphs, begin the first part of your intro.
2. As you continue to dive deeper into your brainstorming, research, and analysis, you may find that your argument delves into places you never thought about initially. As your argument progresses, you can keep building on to your intro.
3. The deepest part of your analysis will eventually become your thesis statement and the final sentence of your introductory paragraph.

Example Opening Paragraphs	Explanation
<p><u>An example of a poor introduction:</u></p> <p>In today's society, customer's want good service with cheap prices and also lots of products. Sam Walton opened Wal-Mart and he wanted to make the customer number one in every situation no matter what. Wal-Mart took pride in serving the customer. Wal-Mart provides its customer's with products at cheap prices. Wal-Mart was founded in the South, so they are polieter because in the South people are friendlier. Although the company sells cheap stuff, the company's business practices cause the immoral treatment of employee's and supplier's. This makes their lives bad and uncomfortable. Wal-Mart's efforts to sell cheap products to American customers are usurped by the unfairness caused by the company's bad business practices and should know better because they are supposed to care about customers. People who work there shop there too, so aren't they customers?</p>	<p>This opener is terrible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first sentence makes far too broad a statement and the paragraph on the whole rambles • There is no connection of one idea to the next, • A colloquial voice is used in the first half, only to shift into overly formal (and incorrect) voice in the end. • The thesis is hard to find and harder to argue, buried in the paragraph by unnecessary details and opinions. • There are spelling, grammar and mechanical errors.
<p><u>An example of a satisfactory introduction:</u></p> <p>When Sam Walton opened Wal-Mart, he makes it a priority to make the customers number one in every situations. Over forty years later, Wal-Mart still takes pride in serving the customers. Wal-Mart provides it's customer's with the latest products at cheap prices. Despite Wal-Mart's efforts to provide affordable products to Americans, the company's business practices led to the unethical treatment of employees and suppliers, reducing their standard of living. This paper will argue that Wal-Mart's efforts to make positive contributions to American consumers are outweighed by the grievances caused by the corporation's business practices.</p>	<p>This paragraph is acceptable.</p> <p>It adequately expresses the purpose of the paper, but the thesis is less complex, sentences are less varied and ideas are often repeated.</p> <p>It also has a few errors in grammar and mechanics.</p> <p>But most importantly, the thesis is clear and arguable.</p>
<p><u>An example of a good introduction:</u></p> <p>When Sam Walton first opened Wal-Mart, he made customers priority number one. Over forty years later, Wal-Mart still takes pride in serving the customer's needs first. The company provides its customers with products at a significantly cheaper cost than its competitors. Yet Wal-Mart's efforts to provide affordable products to American consumers led to unethical treatment of employees and suppliers, drastically reducing workers' standard of living. Wal-Mart's efforts to make positive contributions to its customers are outweighed by the grievances caused by the corporation's business practices.</p>	<p>This is a good opening paragraph because it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gets to the point quickly, • sets some background information and • has a clear thesis statement. <p>The thesis statement is concise and complex, can be argued and expresses a clear point of view.</p> <p>This opening paragraph makes readers pretty sure of what they'll encounter in this paper.</p>