

## Tips for Writing Introductions

When introducing your topic sets you back in your writing process, put the material aside until later.

To get ideas for your introduction, look at openings of books or articles you've enjoyed.

Think about what originally drew you to your topic. If you can state that in a sentence or two, it will probably be interesting for your readers.

Explain to a friend or roommate what you are writing about. What can you say that really grabs that person's attention? That might be a good place to begin your essay.

## Accessing More Information

- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- The Writing Centers at the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. [www.csbsju.edu/writingcenters](http://www.csbsju.edu/writingcenters)

## Acknowledgments

Information for this brochure was adapted from: Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008, available at the Hamline University Bookstore.

## Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



**The Writing Center**  
Hamline University  
Bush Library, Lower Level  
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# Writing an Introduction



When you hear someone express a strong opinion, such as “The United States should abolish the death penalty,” or read a strongly worded bumper sticker that says, for example, “Being a vegetarian is the only healthy way to live,” how do you feel? Are you convinced? Irritated? Has the person succeeded in changing your opinion?

It would be nice if we could influence people with a single sentence, but it doesn’t work that way. A person who wants to educate, motivate, or move others must do it in an artful way. For writers, the first step in this process involves introducing their topic. This means producing an **introduction**.

There are many ways to introduce a topic. This brochure will give you a number of ideas. In some types of writing, for example, science writing, there is a formal, prescribed way to write introductions. Scientific introductions must include background on the topic, the purpose of the report, the author’s hypotheses, and a literature review. In most other academic writing, however, there are many acceptable types of introductions.

Even though the introduction is the first section of your paper, you might not want to write it first. An appropriate introduction may not become apparent until you have written other sections of your paper.

### Elements of a Good Introduction

A good introduction leads the reader into your topic. It engages or “hooks” the reader into reading further. An introduction also:

- Establishes your essay’s tone as serious, funny, formal, informal, provocative, etc.
- Avoids being too general (for example, “Many people around the world don’t have enough to eat”).
- Provides the context and necessary background for what you are writing and, if necessary, defines the terms you will discuss.

### Examples of Effective Introductions

The following paragraphs show actual introductions and the techniques the authors used.

#### *An intriguing fact or statistic:*

Newsweek magazine plunged American women into a state of near panic some years ago when it announced that the chance of a college-educated thirty-five-year-old woman finding a husband was less than her chance of being killed by a terrorist.

Cole, K.C. “Calculated Risks.” *One Hundred Great Essays*. Ed. Robert Diyanni. New York: Penguin Academics, 2008. 141-150.

#### *A personal revelation relating to your topic:*

As a boy, I was fascinated by speed, the wild range of speeds in the world around me.

Sachs, Oliver. “Speed.” *The Best American Essays 2005*. Ed. Susan Orleans. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. 161-180.

#### *A question that challenges or prods the reader:*

What foods do you crave? Ask the question with enough smoldering emphasis on the last word, and the answer is bound to be chocolate.

Ackerman, Diane. “The Psychopharmacology of Chocolate.” *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. Ed. B. Minh Nguyen. New York: Pearson Education, 2005. 242-245.

#### *An example or statement that demonstrates the larger importance of your issue:*

One summer evening in a remote village in the Brooks Range of Alaska, I sat among a group of men listening to hunting stories about the trapping and pursuit of animals. I was particularly interested in several incidents involving wolverine, in part because a friend of mine was studying wolverine in

Canada, among the Cree, but, too, because I find this animal such an intense creature. To hear about its life is to learn more about fierceness.

Lopez, Barry. “Landscape and Narrative.” *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. Ed. B. Minh Nguyen. New York: Pearson Education, 2005. 271-275.

#### *A sentence relating to your conclusion:*

The deserts of southern California, the high, relatively cooler and wetter Mojave and the hotter, dryer Sonoran to the south of it, carry the signatures of many cultures.

Lopez, Barry. “The Stone Horse.” *One Hundred Great Essays*. Ed. Robert Diyanni. New York: Penguin Academics, 2008. 446-456.

#### *A quotation from an expert or well-known person:*

Harry S. Truman liked to say that as president of this country he was its most powerful citizen—but sometimes he added, smiling, the photographers were even more powerful.

Bellow, Saul. “Graven Images.” *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. Ed. B. Minh Nguyen. New York: Pearson Education, 2005. 176-179.

#### *An interesting fact or detail:*

Beneath its innocent plumage, birding is a highly competitive sport.

States, Bert O. “Skill Display in Birding Groups.” *The Best American Essays 2005*. Ed. Susan Orleans. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. 208-221.