



INTRODUCTIONS AND THESES

The purpose of the introduction is to explain to the reader why your topic is important and what he or she needs to know in order to follow the argument of your essay. The introduction should briefly outline the *context* of your essay, state your main *argument*, or *thesis*, and give the reader a sense of the *direction* the argument will take. This takes the form of a brief summary of how you will proceed with your essay. For a ten-page paper, a half to 2/3 of a page for your introduction is generally acceptable.

Context

The context of the essay introduces the problem that you are interested in discussing. You must indicate to the reader which issues raised in the essay question are important and the approach that you will take in addressing these issues. You should name(s) of the articles, books, theories, or plays that you will be discussing, and the names of the authors who wrote them. You should also indicate the main method that you will use to discuss them.

Example One:

If you are writing an essay about imagery in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, you could give your topic *context* by giving a definition of imagery, and by explaining how and why it was used in Shakespearian drama in general. You could then focus in on *Hamlet*, and write your *thesis statement*, which might have to do with the main uses of imagery in *Hamlet*.

Example Two:

If you are writing an essay about Canadian tactics in international diplomacy, you could introduce the topic by defining a concept which is commonly applied to Canadian diplomacy. You would then discuss the defining characteristics of the concept and its historical background. This would set the *context* of your argument. You could go on to narrow your topic down to a specific time period, or a particular Canadian prime minister. Your *thesis* could then be about how his style of international diplomacy conforms, or doesn't conform, to this concept.

Thesis

The *thesis* of your essay has two parts: *topic and argument* or *point of view*. A winning thesis has a narrow *topic* and a specific purpose or *point of view*. Often, the narrower a topic is, the easier it is to gather research about it. The point of view should be what you want to inform or persuade your reader of. It answers the question “So what?”

The Topic

The **topic** is what the essay is about. It should be narrow enough that you can explore many different aspects of the one topic in your essay. For example, your essay topic could be: *cars*. This is a very broad topic. There are many different kinds of cars, and there are many components to a car. Cars play an important part in the economy, and there are many skilled professions associated with car-making and car maintenance. You can see that there is far too much to write about here than you could accommodate in one essay. You would need to make this topic narrower. There are several ways that you can do this. You can narrow the topic by asking yourself the six “*wh*” questions. For example:

1. *What kind of car?*

You can narrow your topic to a specific make (e.g. Ford or Toyota). Better still, you can be even more specific by talking about a particular kind of Ford (e.g. the Explorer/ or the Escape).

2. *When was the car made?*

Another way of narrowing your topic is to limit it to a particular time period. With cars, you could just talk about the newest version of the Ford Explorer.

3. *Where was it made?*

You could be very specific and talk only about 2014 Ford Explorers that were made in Canada.

4. *How much did it cost?*

You could limit your discussion to only the 2014 Ford Explorers that were made in Canada and sold for less than \$25,000 (including upgrade packages).

5. *Who owned it?*

You might be interested in only those Ford Explorers that were leased and not bought.

6. *Why did they buy it?*

Your topic might be finally limited to those who lease Ford Explorers who paid \$25,000 for them, and bought them because they needed transportation to get to their jobs.

You might think that by limiting the topic so drastically, you might not have anything more to say about it. However, that is where your *purpose or point of view* comes in to the picture. The *purpose* of your essay defines why you are interested in this particular topic. You might be

doing research into the market for Ford Explorers in Canada in order to decide whether and where a new Ford plant should be built. Or you might be making the argument that there is room in the market for another high-efficiency, low-cost vehicle for people who lease. Or you could be interested in the kind, quality and number of repairs that are done for this kind of car. You can see that you haven't narrowed your topic too far by making it more specific; on the contrary, you have actually made it easier to do the research, and to write a relevant, interesting essay.

Argument or Point of View

The purpose or *point of view* of the essay is the unifying thread that pulls all your research into line. It focuses your essay, and makes it easy for the reader to understand. Because the purpose is so important to your essay, it must be stated in one clear, easy-to-understand sentence. It is usually placed at the end of the Introduction paragraph.

How can you define a purpose for your essay?

1. **Your discipline** will broadly define the kinds of purposes that are worth pursuing in your essay.

Example:

In economics, an examination of the economic implications of the production or sale of the Ford Explorer would be the broad purpose that you would try to accommodate in your essay. If you were in history, you might be more interested in the history of the development and sale of Ford Explorers.

2. **The professor** may indicate worthwhile purposes for essays in the assignment sheet he/she hands out for the essay.

Example:

If you are studying the sociology of consumerism, your purpose in the essay might be not just the sociological trends that can be uncovered by research into people who buy Ford Explorers, but the specific aspects of consumerism that are indicated by the sales figures of Ford Explorers (i.e. that people buy them because they are good value for money, or because they are status symbols, or because everyone in the neighborhood has one).

3. You must decide for yourself what a **worthwhile purpose** would be for your essay. If you not interested in the topic, or cannot explain to yourself or a friend what the purpose of the essay is in one clear sentence, the chances are that you have no purpose.

Direction

The last thing that you should include in your introduction is a brief "road map" or guide that tells the reader how you will proceed with your argument. This sentence merely tells the reader the aspects of the argument that you will pursue, and the order in which you will pursue them.

Example:

If you are writing a comparison of two films, you would have to tell the reader which aspects of the films you will be comparing. You might choose music, camera angles, and lighting to explore how the directors of the films develop atmosphere. The order in which you list these aspects of the film would determine the order in which you would discuss them in the essay. Thus the reader is forewarned of how the essay will proceed. This allows the reader to follow your argument more easily.

*Remember: It takes time and practice to be able to write a good introduction to an essay. The introduction should be broad enough to serve as a good starting point for the reader, yet specific enough that the reader can easily see how it lays the groundwork for the rest of your essay.