

INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions generally consist of four parts:

- an attention-getting beginning
- reference to the significance of the subject
- statement of the thesis
- main points to be covered

An Attention-Getting Beginning

The first sentence of a paper should interest readers and encourage them to continue reading. An attention-getting first sentence will accomplish that goal. Some possible attention-getting approaches for first sentences include:

- **A controversial statement-** “Some students swear that graduate teaching assistants are inexperienced, ignorant and unprepared to teach.”
- **An element of surprise-** “The older man, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, that strode into class ten minutes late today, was neither a student nor professor but a graduate teaching assistant.” (The identity of the man is the surprise).
- **A note of contradiction-** “Graduate teaching assistants are neither completely students nor teachers and are neither graduates nor assistants.”
- **A short, dramatic statement-** “Beware of graduate teaching assistants.”
- **The use of statistics-** “Most of the two million freshmen entering colleges and universities this fall will be instructed by graduate teaching assistants.”
- **A figure of speech (metaphor or simile)-** “A graduate teaching assistant is like a pilot on a new route: each is capable, but unfamiliar with the course.”
- **The use of quotation-** “A graduate teaching assistant once said...” In this example, begin your introduction with a quote that explains the subject of your paper and corresponds to your thesis.
- **A reference to a current event-** “The recent debate in the freshman dorm about graduate teaching assistants was almost as heated as the one at the United Nations about the Third World.”
- **Proof of your authority-** “Having had seven graduate teaching assistants in my first two semesters at college, I feel well qualified to discuss their strengths and weaknesses.”
- **The definition-** “The University defines a graduate teaching assistant as...”
Introductory sentences beginning with definitions should also be used

sparingly because they can be uninteresting. However, if the subject lends itself to an interesting use of a definition, then this type of introductory sentence can be used successfully.

- **The anecdote**-“I once had a graduate teaching assistant who came to class dressed in pajamas.” Many readers will enjoy short narratives and jokes, but such anecdotes are effective only when they relate directly to the subject being discussed and to the thesis of the paper.

Some things to avoid in a first sentence of an introduction:

- **An apology**-“Although I don’t know much about graduate teaching assistants...” This sentence reduces your credibility with readers and is not captivating.
- **A complaint**- “For lack of a better topic, I decided to write about graduate teaching assistants.” Again, this will reduce your credibility and seriousness with readers and will not entice them to keep reading.
- **Reference to the Title**- “The title of this paper, ‘Graduate Teaching Assistants,’ indicates that this paper is concerned with graduate students who are teaching in college while pursuing their own studies.” This sentence is repetitive and does not introduce new and exciting ideas.

Reference to the Significance of the Subject

After grabbing readers’ attention with an interesting first sentence, it is important to then explain the significance of the topic in your introduction. Consider the following questions: Why is my subject important? Why should people read about it? How will it benefit them? In answering these questions, keep your audience in mind. For example, if you are writing about graduate teaching assistants to a general audience of taxpayers, you might appeal to their financial interests and explain how graduate teaching assistants are less expensive than full professors. If you are writing to parents, you would want to justify the quality of education provided by graduate teaching assistants. Helping readers understand and identify with the significance of your paper will encourage them to continue reading.

Statement of the Thesis

The introduction of a paper should function to introduce the thesis graciously, not to dump it on readers. (While in some traditions your thesis can be stated explicitly, such as “It is the purpose of this paper” or “The subject I plan to discuss,” other types of papers are better suited to an implied introduction of your thesis rather than an abrupt announcement.) Generally, the thesis statement is the final sentence in the introductory paragraph and is only one sentence in length. In longer, more complicated papers, the introduction may be longer than one paragraph and the thesis statement may require two or more sentences.

Main Points to be Covered in the Paper

Particularly in a long paper or one with a complicated organizational plan, it is advisable to indicate your plan for the paper to your readers. In fact, if you discuss the main points in your introduction, this plan will act as a roadmap to help direct readers through your argument. However, in shorter papers, this fourth part of an introduction is not always necessary.

Source: Adelstein, Michael and Jean G. Pival. *The Writing Commitment*. Second Edition. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1980.