

What should be included in my introduction?

STEP

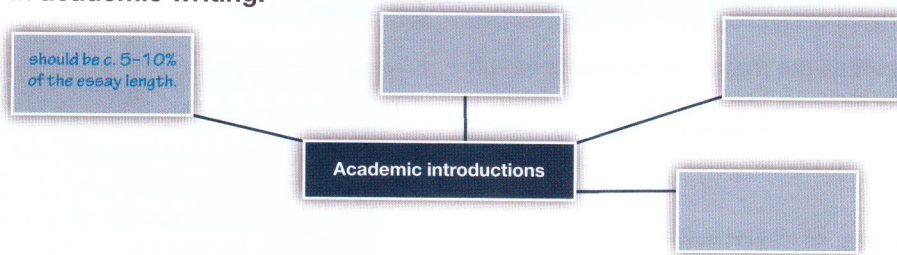
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'The first impression is the last impression.'

Nepalese proverb

A Reflection

Using the skills learnt in Step 14, brainstorm everything you know about introductions in academic writing.



B Contextualization

The following is an introduction from an essay entitled 'What are the characteristics of good academic writing?' Several important components of the introduction have been highlighted. Label them accordingly.

<div></div>	<p>The question of good writing is one of crucial importance to anyone involved in academia. According to one recent survey, 55% of overseas students stated that they find academic writing difficult (Jones, 2008) – a term which is defined, for the purposes of this essay, as referring to all disciplines from the Bachelor's level and beyond. This finding is supported by Fitzpatrick (2003: 208), who maintains that academic writing is 'one of the biggest challenges that overseas students face, and yet there is little support provided to them'; this viewpoint echoes the general trend of the literature (e.g., Kenyon, 2007; Clarke and Wood, 2009). This essay uses both reports from the literature as well as data from both EAP teachers and students, although it confines itself to the humanities and social sciences. It argues that to be a successful academic writer, competence must be developed at the macro-, meso- and micro-level. As such, section 1 focuses on macro-level issues of academic writing, such as structure, section 2 concentrates on academic writing at the paragraph level, and section 3 considers the unit level of the sentence.</p>	<div></div>
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c Analysis

What is the general purpose of an introduction?

It may be said that an introduction has three key functions, also known as 'the 3Ms'.

A Map	A Microcosm	A Marketing tool
To guide the reader through your essay, and show them the direction you will be going.	To give an overview of the main points of the essay and an indication of some of the main conclusions.	To 'sell' yourself to potential readers, showing them that your essay is interesting and worth reading.

What are the key components of an introduction?

The following list identifies the major components which your introduction *may* include. Depending on the length, type and focus of your essay, however, it may not include *all* of the aspects outlined below.

Interesting opening statement

The question of good writing is one of crucial importance to anyone involved in academia.

An interesting fact, statement or anecdote will both gain the reader's interest and indicate that you have something interesting to say.

TOP TIP: A short, powerful, dynamic sentence (rather than a long, detailed one) can often be highly effective in stimulating interest – think of it like the trailer for a film.

Attention-grabbing data

... 55% of overseas students stated that they find academic writing difficult (Jones, 2008).
A well-chosen and interesting number or statistic can sometimes say more than a hundred words of text.

TOP TIP: Do not just use a random number that you find: choose the data carefully, otherwise it will not have the desired effect.

Definition of terms

... a term which is defined, for the purposes of this essay, as ...

If you are using specific terms which may be unfamiliar to the reader, or if your essay contains a number of complex technical terms, then it is best to define these at an early opportunity.

TOP TIP: Use a subject-specific dictionary for definitions rather than a general dictionary.

Relevant and interesting quotation

... Fitzpatrick (2003: 208) ... maintains that academic writing is 'one of the biggest challenges that overseas students face, and yet there is little support provided to them' ...

A well-chosen and appropriate quotation can give focus and clarity to the specific question you wish to address.

When to write your introduction

Although it may seem strange to say so, the introduction is not necessarily the best place to start writing. Many people find it is actually easier to write the introduction when they know more about the essay.

TOP TIP: Any quotation that you use should be better than what you could say yourself, otherwise there is no point in using it.

Background information

... this viewpoint echoes the general trend of the literature (e.g., Kenyon, 2007; Clarke and Wood, 2009).

Identify major scholars who have written on the subject before and why their work is important.

TOP TIP: Be brief – you can go into the detailed background information in the second paragraph (and beyond). You should just give an overview in the introductory paragraph.

Methodology

... reports from the literature as well as data from both EAP teachers and students ...

This is important, particularly if your essay is research-based. You do not need to go into detailed analysis at this point, but an overview may be useful.

TOP TIP: This may be more relevant for science/social science students.

Limitations

... although it confines itself to the humanities and social sciences.

If there are any major restrictions to your investigations, you may want to outline them in the introduction.

TOP TIP: It is not a sign of weakness to present your limitations – it is better to tell the reader at the beginning.

Thesis statement

It argues that to be a successful academic writer, competence must be developed at the macro-, meso- and micro-level.

It is important to tell the reader what the main purpose/central argument of your essay is.

TOP TIP: Ideally, there should be no ambiguity; your idea should be clearly, precisely expressed.

Outline of sections

... section 1 focuses on ... section 2 concentrates on ... section 3 considers ...

Present what you will be looking at in the rest of the essay to show the reader the direction in which you are going.

TOP TIP: It is important to use a range of verbs here, and it is common to use the present simple tense.

How does the introduction differ from the conclusion?

Students often confuse these two components of the essay, resulting in repetition of both content and language. The key distinction between these two parts of the essay is as follows:

- The focus of an introduction is to indicate to the reader *what you are going to say*.
- The focus of a conclusion is to remind the reader *what you have said*.

Conclusions are the specific focus of Step 20.

D Activation

Which sentence (a) or (b) is the better example of each component of an introduction?

1. Interesting opening statement

- a) The introduction represents the beginning of every academic essay, and is therefore important.
- b) Introductions are the backbone to every academic essay.

2. Attention-grabbing data

- a) 17% of students stated that they write their introductions after they have written the rest of their essay.
- b) 85% of tutors reported that their first impression of a student's essay was 'very important'.

3. Relevant and interesting quotation

- a) 'Introductions ... stimulate interest, indicate direction and provide necessary support for the reader.'
- b) 'Introductions, it can be said, raise readers' interest levels, show them in which general direction the essay is heading, and give them the information they need.'

4. Outline of sections

- a) Part 1 will focus on the structure of introductions. Part 2 will focus on the content of introductions. Part 3 will focus on the language of introductions.
- b) Part 1 analyzes the structure of introductions while part 2 examines their content. Part 3, meanwhile, considers the cross-cutting importance of language.

E Personalization

■ Read the introductions to your previous essays. Do they contain the 3Ms?

- **Map:** Is it clear where it's going?
- **Microcosm:** Is the main focus of your essay clear?
- **Marketing tool:** Is the reader going to be interested?

■ If not, identify what components are required, and rewrite.

■ Consider the introduction for your next essay. If you lack confidence in writing it, create a blank table (use relevant components of the table below), and write it on a sentence-by-sentence basis. It will then be easier to put together as a whole.

Interesting opening statement	
Definition of terms	
Quotation	
Thesis statement	
Outline of sections	

F Extension

- Step 15 focuses on writing a **thesis statement**, one of the key components of an introduction.
- Step 20 analyzes **conclusions**, wherein you can compare them with introductions.
- Appendix 1, Step 19, Document 7 is a photocopyable version of the table presented in part E.
- Appendix 3, Step 19 presents sample introductions from different academic disciplines.