

Why a good introduction is important

Your introduction is probably the single most important part of your assignment. A good introduction sets the scene for the rest of your assignment. It is like a road map for the rest of your assignment. A good map leads you to where you want to go, a poor map gets you lost.

It doesn't matter if you are writing an essay or a report, a good introduction is essential. The introduction is the first part of your assignment that the marker reads. It's the only place you get to make a good first impression. It's better to get off to a good start than to get off to a bad start and then have to claw your way back.

A good introduction shows the marker that you are organised and have a plan for how you are going to approach the topic. It tells the marker that you have a position in relation to the topic. It tells the reader that you have identified the main points you intend to develop.

A university assignment is not a mystery story. You want to give your reader as few surprises as possible. The way to do this is to write the introduction so that it predicts what is going to come in the rest of your assignment.

What goes into a good introduction

The job of your *introduction* is to point forward to what is going to happen. Your introduction should tell the reader what is going to happen in the assignment and what your assignment is going to be about. (see Writing Paragraphs Quick Guide)

The *introduction* has three to four main sub-parts.

It gives an *orientation* to the topic, usually by restating the topic of the question. You should also define any *key terms* in the topic.

It tells the reader your position in relation to the topic. This is often called a *thesis statement*. For example, in an *argument* type essay, where you are asked to take a side, you should say whether you are *for*, *against* or *neutral* towards the topic.

Your introduction should then *identify* and *list* each of the main points you are going to raise in your discussion in the same order that you are going to raise them in the body of your essay. (see Organising information for your Assignments Quick Guide)

That's enough to put in an introduction. You should **not** develop any points or present any arguments or evidence in the introduction. That comes later. In a standard essay of around 1500 words one paragraph is about enough to say what needs to be said in an introduction.

Sample Introductions

Here is an *introductory* paragraph in response to the task:

What is meant by globalisation? Discuss the effects of globalisation on at least two of the following: trade, manufacturing, consumerism, international relations, cultural identity.

Quick Guide

What is in this guide

- Why a good introduction is important
- What goes into a good introduction
- Sample Introductions
- Embedded links to related Quick Guides

Since the end of the Cold War and the triumph of capitalism as the world's dominant economic system globalisation has become a growing phenomenon. The term globalisation describes the increasing contact and interdependence among national economies and the increasingly international nature of markets, capital, labour and technology. Globalisation has brought with it a rapid increase in international social, cultural and technological exchange. Despite concerns about the detrimental effects of globalisation on developing nations and cultural identities, the interdependence of national economies and societies continues to increase. This paper will argue that the effects of globalisation on trade, manufacturing and international relations cannot really be avoided and can be viewed as both positive and negative depending on who is doing the viewing.

The parts of the introduction are colour coded:

Orientation to topic, definition, thesis statement, main points to be developed

Here is another *introduction* in response to a different task:

Avoidance of obesity is an important factor in maintaining health and retarding the progression of chronic disease. Discuss. (1500 words)

There are many factors which contribute increases and decreases in and maintenance of health and vitality in individuals. One such factor is obesity. According to McLaren and Meguid (1988, p. 148), obesity occurs when there is an imbalance in the height-to-weight ratio in individuals, specifically where the weight component is too high for the height factor. An excess of body fat of 20% or more is classed as obese. Whilst many other factors contribute to the loss of general well being and to the onset of disease, it will be shown that avoidance of obesity is an important factor in maintaining health and retarding the progression of chronic disease. This paper will assess the effects of obesity on the quality of life physically, psychologically, socially and economically. From the results of this assessment it will be argued that obesity is such a serious risk to health and well-being that serious and focused action is often necessary to avoid being obese.

The parts of the introduction are colour coded:

Orientation to topic, main points to be developed, thesis statement

Notice how both of these introductions begin with a general statement which orients the reader to the topic, then on to the main points of the topic which relate most closely to the question and finally on the writer's position in relation to the topic. The shift is from general to more and more specific. When you write an introduction with this general-to-specific pattern it guides the reader into the topic in organised steps. This helps the reader build a feel for where you are starting from and for where you will be going.

Related Quick Guides

Writing paragraphs, Organising information for your assignments