

THE INVERTED PYRAMID: A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTIONS

No. 10 in the Writing Center Handout Series

A good introduction not only gives your thesis statement and the appropriate background information on your topic, but also grabs your readers' attention and draws them into the rest of your paper. Here is one way to organize an introduction.

GENERAL STATEMENT

This statement should be relevant to the main idea of your paper and not so broad that it becomes a cliché. For example, instead of writing *Throughout history, the media has been saturated with a variety of apocalyptic images,* you could write, *As the twentieth century and second millennium draw to a close, popular culture is saturated with a wide variety of apocalyptic visions mass-marketed through film and literature.*

The second statement tells the reader what kind of media will be discussed and grounds the topic in a specific historical context, the end of the second millennium.

MORE SPECIFIC STATEMENTS

These statements often include background information on your topic and should direct the audience toward your thesis. After reading these statements, your reader should know generally what to expect from your thesis statement.

THESIS STATEMENT

Things to avoid in an introduction:

- **Including too much detail.** If you tell your audience everything that you have to say in your paper in the introduction, then why should they bother to read the rest of it? Present the thesis that you will discuss further in the paper, but do not try to prove it in the introduction.
- **Straying too far off topic.** It is important for your reader to have some background on your topic, but this information must be appropriate to your thesis. Get to the point as soon as possible, without rambling on about irrelevant issues. Present only the most relevant background information in the introduction.
- **Quoting dictionaries.** We all have read papers that begin "According to Webster's Dictionary...." While it is important for you as a writer to formulate your own definitions within your paper, this trite opening is a sure way to put your reader to sleep.

Remember that this model shows just one way to write introductions. For more suggestions, read sample papers and writing style guides, and check out the sources listed below.

For more information on writing introductions, see

The New St. Martin's Handbook, pages 64-65 and 611-612

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/intro.html>

<http://www.richmond.edu/~writing/web/intros.html>



AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

MCCAIN 6-13
(404) 471 8242