Writing an Introduction

An introduction is important for getting the main idea of your paper across and getting your reader’s attention. It should be concise and to the point (save all the specific details for your body paragraphs) and consists of an opening, background information, and a thesis.

Opening

Sometimes referred to as a “hook,” the opening gives the reader their first impression. Some ideas for openings are:

- An anecdote
- A relevant quote
- A description of the background or context
- A narrative or story
- A dilemma/question that needs a solution
- An interesting detail
- A figure of speech or play on words
- A prediction

Not all of these will be appropriate for every paper. Choose one that works for you, and avoid being overly dramatic, overly obvious, or irrelevant.

Background Information

This section should give your reader enough information to understand your thesis. It’s a foundation for the rest of your paper. However, you should avoid giving too much away. Leave your examples and details for the body of your essay. Some information you might want to include is:

- Important names, dates, and events
- The different sides of a debate
- Why the topic is relevant
- Definitions of terms

Depending on the paper you may need more or less background information, but some students go overboard and give way too much information. Look at each sentence and ask yourself if it is necessary for understanding your thesis and paper.

Thesis

The thesis is the most important part of your introduction; it’s what drives the rest of your paper. It’s 1-3 sentences and should include:

- Your specific topic
- Your comment on that topic (argument)
- How you plan on arguing
- Why the argument is important/why you’re writing about it

The thesis, like the rest of your introduction, may evolve as you write. For this reason some students like to start with their body paragraphs before their introduction. When you are ready to refine your thesis, you can refer to CLAS’s thesis handout for more guided assistance.