How to Write an Introduction

More than likely, most of your favorite books and articles contain a solid, well-prepared introduction. Talented writers have a knack of hooking the reader right from the start. In the academic setting, your professor will be pleased —no, ECSTATIC- to read an interesting, captivating introduction.

Your introduction should:

- Contain the thesis statement (your reason for writing).
- Provide the reader with a preview of the paper’s contents.
- Lay an appropriate foundation for the body of the paper.
- ‘Hook’ the audience; make your paper worth reading.

Things to Avoid:

-The ‘definition’ introduction: Some students adhere to starting out their papers with, “Webster’s dictionary defines [term] as…” This technique is dry and overused. If you must provide a definition, make sure the information is absolutely essential and directly relates to the point of the essay.

-The ‘restatement’ introduction: If your professor gave you an assignment prompt, you may be tempted to simply restate the question as your introduction opener. Remember that your professor is well aware of the assignment; merely restating the prompt will usually produce an ineffective introduction.

-“In this paper, I will be discussing…” Because the reader is aware that you wrote the paper, it is unnecessary that you remind them. This phrase is very common and boring; do your best to avoid it.

Strategies for composing an introduction:

- Consider writing your introduction last. Often, students dread the thought of writing a paper because they do not know where to begin. While it comes first, the introduction can sometimes be an ineffective place to start writing. If you struggle with beginning a paper, work on the actual content first. Once you have organized your thoughts in an outline, developed your body paragraphs, and possibly even thought about your conclusion, you will have a good idea on how to write your introduction. Remember that you want to preview the main ideas in your introduction. This does not mean that you should overwhelm your reader by jamming in all of the ideas covered in the body; rather, you simply want to give a ‘taste’ of what’s to come. You will have the rest of the paper to actually develop the ideas presented in your introduction.

- Depending on the genre, think of creative ways to ‘hook’ your reader. A pertinent quotation, thought-provoking question, or interesting anecdote may be enough to spark your reader’s interest.

- Consider placing your thesis statement as the last sentence of your introduction. This way, your reader is reminded of the purpose of the paper right before he or she dives into the body of the paper.