

## Why is an introduction important?

The purpose of the introduction paragraph will vary depending on the type of paper you are writing. Research papers, for example, will have to introduce not only the topic, but also your argument in relation to the points other authors have made. By contrast, when writing a response essay you will only need to introduce the topic and respond to a text using personal experiences (and, perhaps, one or two texts by another author).

Despite these differences, by the second or third sentence of the introductory paragraph, your readers should understand the main topic you wish to address. Each sentence after this should become more and more specific about this topic, providing all the relevant information an uninformed reader would need to comprehend your argument.

The specific argument you want to make about the topic will be your **thesis statement**. Often this statement will be towards the end of your introduction paragraph (for further guidance on the thesis statement, please see the handout titled “Developing a Thesis.”)

Depending on the type of assignment, the thesis statement might be one brief sentence explaining your argument in relation to the arguments of other writers. For more complex essays, such as the research essay, the thesis statement should not only state your argument, but it should also give readers an idea of the purpose of each section of the essay.

If there is one rule of thumb to follow for writing an introduction, it is that *what you write should relate directly to the assignment prompt that your professor has given your class*. Often—though not always—this will mean that you must directly answer the questions on the prompt in this paragraph.

By the end of your introduction, readers should understand at least some of the following:

- ☑ The topic of your essay
- ☑ What others have written or said about this topic
- ☑ The context for the discussion of this topic (historical background, the people or places relevant to the topic, the broader situation around the topic, etc.)
- ☑ Why this topic matters
- ☑ Your point of view on this topic and/or the argument you wish to make
- ☑ Differences and similarities between your point of view and the views of others

**ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE, YOU WILL FIND TWO EXAMPLES OF ASSIGNMENT PROMPTS WITH SAMPLE INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPHS. TRY TO IDENTIFY HOW WELL THESE INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPHS MEET THE ABOVE CRITERIA.**

**EXAMPLE 1**  
**ESSAY 1 ASSIGNMENT**

Scott Russell Sanders's essay, "The Men We Carry in Our Minds" discusses the ways in which the author believes that the working class men of his childhood suffer through a life of toil and struggle, while the wives of these men engage in labor that is less physically demanding. He implies that economic class affects how people understand gender relationships.

Judy Brady's "I Want a Wife" catalogues in minute detail the many demands that husbands often place on their spouses. Meanwhile, in Silvia Federici's "Wages Against Housework" the author criticizes and attacks the ways in which certain types of labor come to appear as though they are natural attributes of men and women.

Your task is to place either Federici or Brady in conversation with Scott Russell Sanders's essay by summarizing the main points of each. Explore how one essay might account for what the other has ignored or left out. Following this, explore how you think concepts of gender are changing today. Has this change been the result of anything either author mentions?

*In the 1900's women were always seen as inferior to men and their role was to be housewives, while their husbands go out to work. Today women's role in society has changed and is much more equal to men than it was in the 1900's. Authors such as Scott Russell Sanders discusses that gender roles depend on economic class, which he believes because of his own personal experiences. While another author, Judy Brady, discusses all the duties of a housewife in the home and how they are mistreated. Lastly, Silvia Federici, another author, discussed that women are unpaid laborers and servants for the working-class men. I believe Sanders leaves out women's housework, while Brady lists the duties of a house wife, but she forgets to include economic class differences. Finally, Federici ignores the physical harm men's labor does to their bodies and how hard they have to work as well.*

**EXAMPLE 2**  
**ESSAY 1 ASSIGNMENT**

In James Baldwin's "Talk to Teachers," the author discusses the ways in which education is meant to "perpetuate the aims of society." In contrast to this, the author asserts what he thinks education should do instead. Baldwin states, "The purpose of education...is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk."

For this essay, please do the following:

1. Briefly summarize Baldwin's essay, showing how he builds and supports his argument.
2. Following this, please state whether or not you agree or disagree with what Baldwin believes the purpose of education should be.
3. Finally, compare what you were taught in school with Baldwin's objections about the education system that existed in his time.

*James Baldwin was an African American author who grew up in the harsh environment of Harlem. He has many specific ideas and beliefs about the wrongs of society which he discusses in his "A talk To Teachers". He talks about the impact society has on education and the many ways it shapes education by discussing a child's surroundings and what that tells a child about how to view his place in life. Baldwin also believes that there are racist rules and regulations in this country which claims to believe in freedom and "equality". As a child grows up he/she begins to question his own identity, realizing that he/she doesn't have equal opportunity. In order to fix these contradictions, Baldwin believes education should create "the ability to look at the world for himself". He also believes a child should "examine everything" in order to achieve change and break the cycle that society has set up for him/her. He believes this will provide the child with a sense of his own identity despite the struggle it will require.*

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