

A Bridge

An introduction acts as a bridge, guiding readers from their daily lives into the context of your essay. The best introductions:

- **get readers invested into the topic,**
- **provide essential context or background information,**
- **and often state a compelling thesis that outlines the main argument or purpose of the essay, giving the reader a clear roadmap of what to expect.**

For example, an introduction about the effects of microplastics pollution should transition readers from their daily routines to the intricate and far-reaching impact of tiny plastic particles on marine ecosystems and human health. Or, an introduction about the technological advancements during the Industrial Revolution should help readers move from their current digital age to the bustling factories and innovations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Note: It's not a hard rule that the thesis must come at the end of introduction, but it is a common convention in academic essays. Ask your instructor if you're not sure what their expectations are.



Getting Started: Some Tips

1. Make sure you **understand the assignment prompt** as it can help you structure your introduction.
2. When offering background information, **provide enough context** for readers to understand your thesis without summarizing sources in detail, which can be done later.
3. Decide on what the **appropriate breadth** of your opening is, keeping it relevant to your topic; make sure it's not too broad.
4. If you struggle with introductions, **consider writing it last.**

Opening Strategies

These are some common strategies for writing the introduction of a college essay. With your unique voice and perspective, they can effectively capture the reader's attention and set the stage for a compelling argument or narrative.

An Intriguing Example

Offer an interesting instance of the essay's broader topic. It piques curiosity and provides a concrete illustration that can make abstract ideas more relatable and understandable.

Example: Imagine a city where buildings are alive, literally growing and adapting to the needs of their inhabitants. Scientists have developed bioengineered structures that respond to environmental changes, repair themselves when damaged, and even produce food and oxygen. This living architecture not only transforms urban living but also offers sustainable solutions to climate change and resource scarcity.

A Provocative and Relevant Quote

Present a bold or challenging statement. It can set the tone for the essay and prompt readers to think critically about the topic. Quotations from authoritative or famous figures can also lend credibility to the essay.

Example: Voltaire asserts that "those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." In a world increasingly dominated by social media and 24-hour news cycles, Voltaire's words resonate more profoundly than ever. Consider the rise of misinformation and conspiracy theories that have led to real-world consequences, such as the storming of the U.S. Capitol in January 2021. This event demonstrated how deeply held false beliefs could incite individuals to commit violent acts against democratic institutions.

A Thought-Provoking Question

Prompt your reader to consider their perspectives and engage with the topic. A thoughtful question encourages critical thinking and sets up the essay to explore complex issues and provide insightful answers.

Example: What would happen if we could no longer trust the information we receive daily? How would our society change if misinformation became the norm rather than the exception?

Opening Strategies Continued

A Puzzling Scenario

Capture readers' imaginations by presenting a real or hypothetical situation that challenges their assumptions. This approach can stimulate interest and encourage readers to think deeply about the implications, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of the topic.

Example: Miguel Vasquez woke up one morning to discover that every text, email, and digital record of his existence had vanished. His phone was empty, his social media profiles were gone, and even the bank had no record of his accounts. He quickly discovered how difficult it was to navigate a world where his digital identity has been erased. Trying to rebuild his life from scratch without any digital proof was nearly impossible.

A Vivid Anecdote

A vivid anecdote can engage readers emotionally and make the essay more relatable and personal. It provides a narrative hook that can make the essay more compelling and memorable. Anecdotes can also illustrate the essay's themes in a concrete and humanized way.

Example: In our computer science class, we were exploring the capabilities of artificial intelligence, from facial recognition to predictive policing algorithms. Our professor showed us a video about an AI system used in criminal justice to predict reoffending rates. After the video, my classmate Alex, who was usually quiet, raised his hand and told us about a clip he watched of a Black man, falsely accused by an AI system, sharing his traumatic experience. Then he asked, "What happens when these systems are biased against people of color?" The room fell silent. Alex's question sparked a passionate discussion about how these algorithms, trained on biased historical data, perpetuate racial prejudices. We debated the ethical responsibilities of developers and the need for diverse voices in tech. This moment shattered our perception of AI as an infallible tool and highlighted the urgent need to address racial biases in technology. It was a wake-up call, making us realize that without careful oversight, AI could reinforce the very prejudices it was supposed to eliminate.

Less Effective Approaches

Avoid writing a very general opening. This kind of introduction makes broad, sweeping statements about the relevance of the topic since the beginning of time, throughout the world, etc. It is usually very general and fails to connect to the thesis.

- Example: Since the dawn of time, crime has been a problem for human societies.

Avoid starting with a dictionary definition. If the concept is complex, define it later in your essay. If it's simple, assume readers know the definition. Dictionary introductions are overused and often ineffective. Instead, develop your own definition in the context of your assignment.

- Example: Webster's dictionary defines microplastics as "small plastic particles less than five millimeters in diameter." These tiny plastics come from a variety of sources and have significant environmental impacts.

Avoid starting with a question that has an obvious answer. Starting with a question that has an obvious answer can be seen as a weak opening. It can feel like a gimmick and doesn't provide the reader with any substantial information.

- Example: Have you ever wondered whether microplastics are bad for our environment?

Don't assume the readers share specific perspectives. By avoiding such assumptions, writers ensure their introduction is inclusive and clear, allowing a broader audience to engage with the content without feeling excluded or confused. This is also why it's best to avoid writing in second person (you) in academic essays.

- Example: Your social media use is causing depression and making it harder for you to sleep.

Don't create a "filler" introduction with vague sentences that convey little, serving only to fill space. If you're not sure how to start, try writing the introduction last.

- Example: Pollution has been around for a very long time. Microplastics are a significant issue. There are many sources of microplastics. Each source poses different threats.