Introductions

The introduction is arguably the most important section in an academic essay. It accomplishes several essential functions:

- Catch the reader’s attention
- Reveal the subject you intend to explore
- Offer necessary context
- Explicitly state the claim or thesis you intend to argue
- Provide a preview of the evidence you plan to use as support

Consider the introduction a distillation of your paper as a whole. If you have a strong introduction, your readers will understand your purpose and have confidence in your ability to open their eyes to a legitimate viewpoint on a compelling issue.

Clear organization of an introduction also works to draw the reader in. In most cases, you want to move from general to specific and from facts to opinion. After opening with a hook (an emphatic statement, a pithy quotation, a rhetorical question, etc.), offer readers the necessary context on the subject that you are exploring. These opening sentences should orient the reader and create a bridge to your thesis statement. Most readers look for the thesis in the last lines of the introduction. Either within the thesis statement, or in a sentence that follows it, provide the main issues of support or reasons for your claim. These briefly stated reasons are abridged versions of the topic sentences that will open each of the body paragraphs, and appear in the same order. With this map of support, readers will be able to follow your train of thought quite easily.

Here is an example of an introduction to formal analysis of Lynda Benglis’s Zita:

Who says a woman artist can’t be tough? Lynda Benglis’s sculpture Zita, 1972, which hangs on a wall in the twentieth-century gallery of the RISD Museum of Art, is a twisted, clumpy knot of glitter- and paint-coated cotton tubes. Part of her “Sparkle Knot” series, it is simultaneously pretty and crude, combining pastel colors and glitz with raw materials and muscular, even sloppy, physicality. By combining typically “feminine” and typically “masculine” qualities, Benglis challenges notions of what a woman artist can or should make. Zita displays this provocation in several ways: in its palette, its materials, and its execution.