

## How to Write an Effective Introduction

Pretend you have been asked to write a paper where you answer a simple prompt: *Why did the American patriots defeat the British in the American Revolution?*

I. An effective introduction should:

- \* **specifically** answer ALL of the questions in the prompt
- \* set up a **blueprint or roadmap** for the rest of the paper
  - this means give a preview of – or hint at – the central points you will make in the body of the paper
- \* contain an argument that is:
  - debatable (in other words, the reader can argue another way)
  - developed in the introduction over several sentences
    - an argument encapsulated in 1-2 sentences is not necessarily wrong, but as an instructor, I believe it is ineffective for setting up the blueprint and answering all of the questions in the prompt
- \* (assuming the paper is between five and ten pages long):
  - should have an introduction that is between ½ page and 1 full page in length
  - the introduction should be the FIRST paragraph

II. Are there any key strategies to improving an introduction? YES. Try to:

- \* answer the **“how and why.”**
  - \* Have at least one sentence with the word **“because”** in it.
- An *unspecific* argumentative statement might say something like:
- The American colonists defeated the British due to many important factors
    - Here, the reader is left to wonder: how and why specifically? What important factors is the author talking about? Note: it should NOT be a surprise left for later
    - you should be telling me UP FRONT what you will argue
- A *specific* argumentative statement might say something like:
- Example #2: The American colonists defeated the British **because** of French military support, inspiring leadership from George Washington, repeated British military failures, and the inability of the British to completely subdue a colonial population residing in a large geographical area.
    - and from this point, you can elaborate a bit on these points with a few sentences
  - if I’m left asking lots of questions at the end of your intro, you don’t have a good intro

III. What other techniques do you have for writing an introduction?

- first, figure out the evidence you’ll need to use in answering the prompt
- then think of how you’ll analyze this evidence in the body paragraphs
- write the introduction last
- why is this a good approach?
  - because you need to figure out what you can prove first with your evidence
  - and as you’re writing your paper, your arguments will change
  - this saves you the time you’ll spend re-tweaking your introduction
- remember, the introduction should be a reflection of the central arguments in the paper.

### **Introductory Paragraph**

\* answer how and why the patriots won the American Revolution

a – French military support

b – Inspiring leadership from George Washington

c – British alienated support in the South

### **A: First Body Paragraph**

Central Theme: French military support for the American colonists was decisive

\* evidence and quotes for support

\* analysis

### **B: Second Body Paragraph**

Central Theme: inspiring leadership from George Washington

\* evidence and quotes for support

\* analysis

### **C: Third Body Paragraph**

Central Theme: British alienates support in the South

\* evidence and quotes for support

\* analysis

### **Conclusion**

\* restate central arguments of the paper (without repeating introduction word for word)

\* leave the reader with something new and provocative

**Note:** This is just a general model – i.e., you will probably have more than three body paragraphs