Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. Usually when you sit down to respond to an assignment, you have at least some sense of what you want to say in the body of your paper. You might have chosen a few examples you want to use or have an idea that will help you answer the main question of your assignment; these sections, therefore, may not be as hard to write. And it’s fine to write them first! But in your final draft, these middle parts of the paper can’t just come out of thin air; they need to be introduced and concluded in a way that makes sense to your reader.

Your introduction and conclusion act as bridges that transport your readers from their own lives into the “place” of your analysis. If your readers pick up your paper about education in the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, for example, they need a transition to help them leave behind the world of Chapel Hill, television, e-mail, and The Daily Tar Heel and to help them temporarily enter the world of nineteenth-century American slavery. By providing an introduction that helps your readers make a transition between their own world and the issues you will be writing about, you give your readers the tools they need to get into your topic and care about what you are saying. Similarly, once you’ve hooked your readers with the introduction and offered evidence to prove your thesis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your readers make the transition back to their daily lives.

The introductory paragraph of any paper, long or short, should start with [a sentence that piques the interest of your readers](https://www.thoughtco.com/writing-a-hook-for-your-essay-1856994).

In a well-constructed first paragraph, [that first sentence](https://www.thoughtco.com/the-first-sentence-of-a-book-report-1857642) will lead into three or four sentences that provide details about the subject or your process you will address in the body of your essay. These sentences should also set the stage for your [thesis statement](https://www.thoughtco.com/thesis-statement-examples-and-instruction-1857566).

The [thesis statement](https://www.thoughtco.com/thesis-statement-composition-1692466) is the subject of much instruction and training. The entirety of your paper hangs on that sentence, which is generally the last sentence of your introductory paragraph.

In summary, your introductory paragraph should contain the following:

1. An attention-grabbing first sentence

As you researched your topic, you probably discovered some interesting anecdotes, quotes, or trivial facts. This is exactly the sort of thing you should use for an engaging introduction.

Consider these ideas for creating a strong beginning:

**Surprising fact:** The pentagon has twice as many bathrooms as are necessary. The famous government building was constructed in the 1940s, when segregation laws required that separate bathrooms be installed for people of African descent. This building isn’t the only American icon that harkens back to this embarrassing and hurtful time in our history. Across the United States there are many examples of leftover laws and customs that reflect the racism that once permeated American society.

**Humor:** When my older brother substituted fresh eggs for our hard-boiled Easter eggs, he didn’t realize our father would take the first crack at hiding them. My brother’s holiday ended early that particular day in 1991, but the rest of the family enjoyed the warm April weather, outside on the lawn, until late into the evening. Perhaps it was the warmth of the day and the joy of eating Easter roast while Tommy contemplated his actions that make my memories of Easter so sweet. Whatever the true reason, the fact is that my favorite holiday of the year is Easter Sunday.

**Quotation:** Hillary Rodham Clinton once said that “There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard.” In 2006, when Nancy Pelosi became the nation’s first female Speaker of the House, one woman’s voice rang out clear. With this development, democracy grew to its truest level ever in terms of women’s equality. The historical event also paved the way for Senator Clinton as she warmed her own vocal chords in preparation for a presidential race.

1. Informative sentences that build to your thesis

The body of your introductory paragraph should fulfill two functions: it should explain your first sentence and it should build up to your thesis statement. You'll find that this is much easier than it sounds. Just follow the pattern you see in the above examples. Your introductory paragraph should hook the attention of your audience and compel them to want to continue reading.

1. The thesis statement, which makes a claim or states a view that you will support or build upon in the body of your paper

A thesis statement provides the foundation for your entire [research paper](https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-a-research-paper-1857272) or essay. This statement is the central assertion that you want to express in your essay. Put another way, a thesis statement is made up of one or two sentences that lay out your central idea and express an informed, reasoned answer to your research question.

The thesis statement serves as the organizing principle of the text and appears in the [introductory paragraph](https://www.thoughtco.com/introductory-paragraph-essays-and-reports-1691081). It is not a mere statement of fact. Rather, it is an idea, a claim, or an interpretation, one that others may dispute. Your job as a writer is to persuade the reader—through the careful use of examples and thoughtful analysis—that your argument is a valid one.

Because the role of the thesis statement is to state the central message of your entire paper, it is important to revisit (and maybe rewrite) your thesis statement after the paper is written. In fact, it is quite normal for your message to change as you construct your paper.