

Quiz: Listen to the 'What do I put in an introduction?' video - Stage 2 Part 2.

As you listen fill in the 13 gaps with the key terms that you hear. When you have finished you can check your answers against the transcript next to the video.

Hello. I'm Jackie Wills I've been RLF fellow at Sussex since September 2010. I see up to six students a day with questions about their writing and I'm often asked 'what do I put in an introduction?' So, here's a short guide. Your introduction is where you set up your store, it's where you're totally clear about your argument and how you're developing it.

Think of it as a statement of opinion or theory, the place where results are revealed. It's where you identify the issues you're going to explore and where you show you've understood the title. A good introduction inspires the reader because it approaches the title or question confidently. If you imagine an essay as a conversation, your introduction is where you tell a friend you haven't seen for years the really important news. As the conversation goes on you elaborate on your news as you would in the body of the essay and by the end of the conversation you're more reflective – this is the role of the conclusion. The style of your introduction will vary according to whether you're writing a science or humanities essay, but its function is essentially the same depending on your subject; it's the place to summarise your argument and conclusions or reveal your findings, identify the stance you're taking and how your argument fits into the critical landscape. If you use a quote make it relevant and not too long. If your argument is based on a specific theory, make this clear and elaborate on it in the body. Identify major trends or factions that contribute to the debate you're engaging with. Make your methodology clear.

An introduction needs to be 10% of the essay's total word count. Now there are two common mistakes in an introduction: one is to repeat the title in your first sentence. You don't need to do this. If your title says critically analyse X you don't need to write 'I am going to critically analyse X'. The second mistake is to save your big ideas for the conclusion. This isn't a novel – you don't need to keep the plot secret. You need to let the reader know what the big ideas are from the start, and the place for these ideas is the introduction. This is why it's important to plan and know your argument before you start writing. Then you're in no doubt about what to put in your introduction. It will lead the reader naturally into the body of your essay because you've already worked out the structure, and the body leads smoothly into the conclusion. And it's worth remembering you don't have to write your introduction first – in fact, writers often compose it at the end.

Certainly be prepared to re-draft it if you find you've moved away from your plan, but regardless of whether you write it first or last the introduction is your chance to draw a reader in.