

Introductions

Must be at least 3 sentences.

Should only be written once you have your thesis. It is impossible to introduce your argument when you don't yet have one.

The purpose of an introduction is to set the stage for your paper and to attract the attention of you readers. Start to focus on your thesis immediately. Avoid broad generalizations such as "Throughout history," "Everyone," and "Society," because they are uninteresting and do nothing to set up your argument. As the intro progresses, move towards more specificity in your sentences until you reach your thesis.

Note: Your audience is already familiar with the text. Therefore, do not re-tell plot or text at length. Also, avoid stating the obvious, such as "Boo Radley is the town recluse."

General Format

- 1) In the first 1-2 sentences, introduce the author(s) and text(s) you will be discussing.
- 2) You can follow this with a **very short** discussion of plot, characters, theme, historical background, but remember that **your audience has read the text(s)**. Be brief!
- 3) Then, present the general problem and/or issue you will tackle in your paper. Make the subject specific to your essay. So, rather than "death," say "the three bodies;" or, rather than "love," say "marriage plot." Keeping your focus narrow from the start will give your essay strength. When listing the general problem, establish that there is cause for misunderstanding or controversy, or that there is a dimension of the text that is hidden unless viewed in a certain manner. You can establish the issue in several ways:
 - Explain the problem or issue.
 - Open with a question which you will develop in the next paragraph (Note: it should be a theoretical question that cannot be answered in 1 or 2 short statements. So, it should not be "have you ever thought about...?")
 - Use a passage from a critic to illustrate the potential for misunderstanding.
 - Use a passage from the text to illustrate the problem or issue.
- 4) Finally, present your thesis. It should answer, in some form, the questions or issues you previously raised, as well as forward an **argument about the issue**.

In Brief:

Common introduction format:

Opens with statement of essay's general subject [includes author(s) and title(s)],

Clarifies or limits subject in one or more sentences,

Then asserts the point of the essay with the thesis statement.

Some Examples of Introductions:

[1] Walt Whitman's "A Sight in Camp in the Day-Break Grey and Dim" features the bodies of three dead soldiers, as seen through the eyes of another soldier. [2] His meditation on the bodies reveals a barrier between the living and the dead that the speaker tries to overcome, as well as imposing Christ onto the face of one of the soldiers. [3] Through the bodies and Christ, Whitman reveals the inherent alienation, confusion, and spiritual depravity that war entails.

Note that in the 1st sentence the author and the text are introduced, as well as the central focus of the essay: the three dead soldiers.

The 2nd sentence complicates the image of the soldiers by adding the second idea of the barrier between the living and the dead, and the third idea of imposing Christ.

The 3rd and final sentence of the intro is the thesis, which reveals that the essay will argue that the soldiers represent alienation, confusion, and spiritual depravity of war.

[1] *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells feature characters that resist the traditional marriage plot. [2] Isabel Archer and Tom Corey, respectively, consciously defy the assumptions of society through their choice of spouse. [3] In *Tradition/Counter Tradition*, Joseph Allen Boone refers to this defiance as "counter-narrative: the persistent 'undoing' of the dominant tradition by the contradictions concealed within the specific forms that its representations of 'life' and 'love' have assumed" (2). [4] Thus, hidden within these two texts are the keys to undoing the conventions that many characters assume to be immutable. [5] Also, the fact that such resistance occurs during discourse on love and marriage is essential to understanding the risks involved in changing these conventions. [6] At the heart of each society is the family, which is the smallest unit of people. [7] If changes occur within the family, then changes will occur in the larger society. [8] Conventionally, marriage is the foundation from which the family builds. [9] So society has a large stake in the marriages of its members. [10] Tom Corey and Isabel Archer do their best to both question and evade this marriage plot in which society traps them. [11] However, by the end of the novel total evasion of the marriage plot becomes impossible; Isabel and Tom reveal their ability only to restructure the marriage plot according to their own desires.

The 1st sentence introduces the two texts and their authors, as well as the specific "sign" (resistance of marriage plot) the essay will discuss.

The 2nd sentence narrows this broad topic by mentioning which characters the essay will discuss and how they resist the marriage plot.

The 3rd sentence introduces literary criticism to help set the stage for the argument.

Sentences 4-8 slowly build an argument by bringing in several points and factors which need to be laid out before the thesis can argue anything.

In sentence 10, the paragraph once again brings the focus back to the characters and the problem they faced in the texts.

Finally, the thesis takes the characters' struggles and makes an argument/claim: that the characters can only restructure the marriage plot, not evade it.

Conclusions

Minimum 3-5 sentences.

Purpose:

To bring all of your thesis points together in a reflective manner,
Reinforce the main points and blend them together for coherency,
Provide a feeling of closure to the essay,

Answer “So what?”, “Why is this important?”, “Why should the reader care?” in light of the entire essay and the points you have discussed.

A conclusion can (but not all do):

- End with obvious closure that gives the essay a sense of completeness.
- Refer to an example, fact, or statistic made in the introduction.
- Leave the reader with an understanding of what to think, do, or believe about the essay’s subject matter. You can do this by ending with a question that makes the reader think or commenting on the future.

DO NOT:

- Restate your introduction. Instead, bring in the points from the body of your essay and answer the “So What?” question.
- Apologize or cast doubt on your essay (ex: “Even though I’m no expert,” “this may not be convincing, but I believe it’s true.”)
- Start off in an entirely new direction with a different or broader subject, or introduce unnecessary or irrelevant details.

DO:

- Revisit the thesis statement. Note: **DO Not** copy and paste your thesis statement from the introduction. Rather, reword the thesis in an interesting or clearer manner to allow for a little more detail or complexity (i.e., now that the reader knows all of the points in your essay, how should they view the thesis?). When you do this, pause to mention the implications of the thesis, especially as it pertains to the subject matter of your essay.
- Recap (Briefly!) your argument. Remind the reader of your main points, and make sure that each point answers the “So what?” question.
- Take the conclusion one step further. This is **not** going off in a completely new direction. Rather, assume that because you have made a very solid argument, there are options for where the essay could go if you had space. In other words, since we now have X, we can discover Y. This tactic proves that you understand the complexities of your argument and that you know the argument is not closed.

Some Examples of Conclusions

[1] Thus Whitman uses the bodies and the image of Christ to reveal the utter desolation and bewilderment the soldiers encounter in the Civil War.

[2] Perhaps the speaker's need to connect with the isolated dead is, in actuality, an attempt to combat the sudden absence of God in the war. [3] Whitman asserts that the bodies of all men help to magnify the consequences of war that all men experience, as well as creating a desolate society of death in which only living soldiers can also participate. [4] Whitman offers no solutions to the problem, except that the living may find solace in the dead.

[1] The resistance to the traditional marriage plots in *The Portrait of a Lady* and in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* reveals the realist setting of the novels as well as the characters' inability to fully evade the conventional plots dictated by society. [2] Their resistance furthermore illuminates an anxiety regarding social instability. [3] Society cannot "persuade" Isabel and Tom to do any thing; in fact, the more society tries, the harder Isabel and Tom push back. [4] Thus, the actions of Isabel and Tom show the diminution of society's control over its subjects. [5] To survive and to prevent complete social breakdown, society must allow certain aspects of its plots to be restructured. [6] The malleability of society manifests in the fact that Isabel and Tom actually do make marriages. [7] However, society can only bend so far and change so swiftly, as evidenced by the death of Isabel's child and by the physical removal of Tom and Penelope from America. [8] Their resistance to the conventional marriage plot will affect society overall, but they must pay the price as the instigators of this change.

It begins with a re-worded thesis and a list of the "signs" examined: the bodies and the image of Christ.

Sentences 2 & 3 give several answers to the "So What?" question.

Finally, sentence 4 gives an overall "answer/claim" to the thesis, that the living find solace in the dead. This idea was not actually mentioned in the essay, but it is a logical conclusion given the points the essay discusses.

This conclusion begins with the subject discussed, marriage plots, and a re-worded thesis.

Sentences 2 – 4 re-iterate points brought up in the 1st half of the essay and focus on the initial actions of the characters

Sentences 5 – 7 summarize the points from the second half of the essay, and focus on the results of the actions the characters took.

To create the summary sentences, simply boil down the point of each paragraph (or each main point) into one sentence.

Finally, sentence 8 answers the "So What?" question regarding the character's inability to fully evade conventional plots. The reader should care because the characters did actually affect society and because they "paid the price" for their actions.