Introductions provide a road map for your paper and shape the argument, while also grabbing a reader's interest and informing them of your topic. An introduction can be broken down into three key parts: an attention grabbing first sentence, the supporting sentences that build toward your thesis, and the thesis itself.

The Attention Grabbing First Sentence

It is helpful to have a first sentence that both says something relevant to your topic and "hooks" your reader's attention. There are a number of ways to approach a first sentence. Below are four examples of opening lines that grab the reader's attention and hint at the topic of the overall paper:

Historical View: "In the summer of 1919, Kelsey Fischell survived an attack from a Great White Shark, in which she lost her right arm, only to be crushed to death by a vending machine three months later."

Surprising Statement: "Vending machines are twice as deadly as sharks."

Anecdotal: "While studying for her PhD in Marine Biology, Christina Prosnak learned from her colleagues that the snack vending machine down the hall had resulted in more workplace injuries at the Shark Institute than all of the Institute's sharks combined."

Declarative: "Shark attacks are often terrifying and unpredictable, but focusing only on attacks from animals that many people do not interact with on a daily basis can distract from the true threat presented by the everyday vending machine.".

Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences help build upon your first sentence. Supporting sentences contain details or data which will help develop the paper's overall argument, and lead into the paper's thesis statement. Below are two examples of supporting sentences:

Agreement: "The case of Kelsey Fischell is a prime example of how we cannot assume how dangerous something is just because of whether or not you are "supposed to" be afraid of it."

Data: "Vending machines have been shown to kill 13,000 people a year, while sharks only kill 6,500."

These supporting sentences provide readers with a link to the first sentence and also help transition to the introduction's thesis statement.

Thesis Statement

If your introduction is the foundation of your paper, then the thesis is the outline. It summarizes your position, which should be debatable rather than a statement of fact, and sets up the main claims that will support your argument. For more information on writing a thesis statement, see our thesis handout.

Introduction Writing Tips:

- Try to avoid opening statements that directly reveal your claims or opinions, such as: "In this paper…"; "This paper will…"; "I am trying to prove that…."; "In my humble opinion…"
- Try to avoid opening with dictionary definitions. Definitions are typically used in supporting your overall argument or the claims you set up in your thesis, and so are usually easier to incorporate later in the paper.
- Try to avoid the repetition of ideas within your supporting sentences. Think of the supporting sentences like the steps you are using to move from a broad idea to your specific claim, and allow each one to narrow in focus as you work towards your thesis statement.