

## 1.22 Writing introductions

Your introduction is the first impression your lecturer (or marker) will have of your writing.

A good introduction will show them that you know what you're talking about and that you're going to complete the task in question.

A bad introduction will have the opposite effect and might even prejudice the reader against the rest of the writing, even if it does improve.

The most common mistakes made by students are:

- not to include an introduction at all
- to include an introduction, but one which is unrecognizable as such because it does not follow these rules (for example, it talks about the background but does not explain what the essay is about or how it will answer the question)
- to include unnecessary background/historical information in the introduction
- to make the introduction too short or too long

A good introduction will:

- Show that you are going to answer the question or complete the task
- Show that you understand the issues and their implications
- Show how you are going to do this by indicating the structure of your answer and making clear the main areas that you are going to write about (your plan).
- show evidence that you have carried out some research
- Be totally relevant
- Be concise: about 10% of the total number of words is usually recommended (eg 120 - 150 words in a 1500 word assignment).

You want your lecturers/tutors to say to themselves "Good! This student has understood the question, has done some research and is going to answer the question set, not another one."

So, more specifically, how do you do this?

Essay and Report introductions can be very different, so we'll look at them separately here.

## Essay Introductions

Include a "topic sentence" which indicates the main thrust of your answer. For example:

- This essay deals with the economic and political decline in Britain's world role.
- This assignment will examine Britain's peculiar unwritten constitution.
- This essay will first describe the recent changes in the tax system and will then go on to argue that these changes are unfair and impracticable.
- Four major features of the influence of human behaviour on planning are considered in this essay.
- This essay will analyse the relative advantages and disadvantages of the different operating systems.

You could use the same, or very similar, wording as in the question. If part of the question is "Discuss recent developments in communication technology" then in your introduction say something like "This essay will consider recent developments in the field of communication technology and will ..." Don't leave any room for doubt.

Use words and expressions which clearly show the plan behind your writing, for example: The essay is divided into four main sections. It will first consider ... It will then go on to describe... The third part compares... Finally, some conclusions will be drawn as to...

The importance of good introductions (and conclusions) cannot be stressed too much.

## Report Introductions

The purpose of the introduction is to:

- Introduce the subject/research problem and set the scene.
- Outline the structure of the report and the research.

Remember to check your assignment brief for any particular structural and content requirements.

Generally, the introduction will include some or all of the following:

- An overview of the subject, moving from general to specific (no more than 4 sentences).
- Problem definition (only necessary as a subsection in longer reports)
  - What is the context for the research?
  - In what situation or environment can this problem be observed?

- Scope (only necessary in longer research reports)
  - What are the boundaries of the project?
    - What has been left out and why?
    - What has been included?
  
- Rationale (only necessary in longer research reports)
  - Why has the research been chosen?
    - Identifies a gap?
    - Raises a question to which the answer is unknown?
    - Continues a previous line of enquiry?
  
- Aim(s)
  - What the report/research hopes to achieve overall
  - One, possibly two, Aim(s) needed
  
- Objectives.
  - The steps to be taken to achieve the Aim(s)
  - Five or six for a longer project report, fewer for a shorter report
  
- Background information (if applicable).
  - Relevant company information
  - A brief historical introduction
  - Background theory
  
- Structure of the report
  - A brief summary of what the reader will find in each chapter of the report.

These areas may be included as headed subsections of the Introduction chapter, particularly in long project reports. As indicated, in shorter reports some sections are likely to be unnecessary, or the information may be absorbed into the introductory paragraph.