

Introduction to Cognitive Ethnography and Systematic Field Work (Qualitative Research Methods)

A good introduction paragraph is an essential part of any academic essay. It sets up your argument and tells the reader what to expect.

The main goals of an introduction are to:

Catch your reader's attention.

Give background on your topic.

Present your thesis statement—the central point of your essay.

This introduction example is taken from our interactive essay example on the history of Braille.

Essay introduction example The invention of Braille was a major turning point in the history of disability. The writing system of raised dots used by visually impaired people was developed by Louis Braille in nineteenth-century France. In a society that did not value disabled people in general, blindness was particularly stigmatized, and lack of access to reading and writing was a significant barrier to social participation. The idea of tactile reading was not entirely new, but existing methods based on sighted systems were difficult to learn and use. As the first writing system designed for blind people's needs, Braille was a groundbreaking new accessibility tool. It not only provided practical benefits, but also helped change the cultural status of blindness. This essay begins by discussing the situation of blind people in nineteenth-century Europe. It then describes the invention of Braille and the gradual process of its acceptance within blind education. Subsequently, it explores the wide-ranging effects of this invention on blind people's social and cultural lives.

Step 1: Hook your reader

Your first sentence sets the tone for the whole essay, so spend some time on writing an effective hook.

Avoid long, dense sentences—start with something clear, concise and catchy that will spark your reader's curiosity.

The hook should lead the reader into your essay, giving a sense of the topic you're writing about and why it's interesting. Avoid overly broad claims or plain statements of fact.

Examples: Writing a good hook

Take a look at these examples of weak hooks and learn how to improve them.

Braille was an extremely important invention.

The invention of Braille was a major turning point in the history of disability.

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The first sentence is a dry fact; the second sentence is more interesting, making a bold claim about exactly why the topic is important.

The internet is defined as “a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities.”

The spread of the internet has had a world-changing effect, not least on the world of education.

Avoid using a dictionary definition as your hook, especially if it’s an obvious term that everyone knows. The improved example here is still broad, but it gives us a much clearer sense of what the essay will be about.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a famous book from the nineteenth century.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is often read as a crude cautionary tale about the dangers of scientific advancement.

Instead of just stating a fact that the reader already knows, the improved hook here tells us about the mainstream interpretation of the book, implying that this essay will offer a different interpretation.

Step 2: Give background information

Next, give your reader the context they need to understand your topic and argument. Depending on the subject of your essay, this might include:

Historical, geographical, or social context

An outline of the debate you’re addressing

A summary of relevant theories or research about the topic

Definitions of key terms

The information here should be broad but clearly focused and relevant to your argument.

Don't give too much detail—you can mention points that you will return to later, but save your evidence and interpretation for the main body of the essay.

How much space you need for background depends on your topic and the scope of your essay. In our Braille example, we take a few sentences to introduce the topic and sketch the social context that the essay will address:

Example: Background information The writing system of raised dots used by blind and visually impaired people was developed by Louis Braille in nineteenth-century France. In a society that did not value disabled people in general, blindness was particularly stigmatized, and lack of access to reading and writing was a significant barrier to social participation. The idea of tactile reading was not entirely new, but existing methods based on sighted systems were difficult to learn and use.

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Step 3: Present your thesis statement

Now it's time to narrow your focus and show exactly what you want to say about the topic. This is your thesis statement—a sentence or two that sums up your overall argument.

This is the most important part of your introduction. A good thesis isn't just a statement of fact, but a claim that requires evidence and explanation.

The goal is to clearly convey your own position in a debate or your central point about a topic.

Example: Thesis statement As the first writing system designed for blind people's needs, Braille was a groundbreaking new accessibility tool. It not only provided practical benefits, but also helped change the cultural status of blindness.

Step 4: Map your essay's structure

Particularly in longer essays, it's helpful to end the introduction by signposting what will be covered in each part. Keep it concise and give your reader a clear sense of the direction your argument will take.

Example: Signposting This essay begins by discussing the situation of blind people in nineteenth-century Europe. It then describes the invention of Braille and the gradual process of its acceptance within blind education. Subsequently, it explores the wide-ranging effects of this invention on blind people's social and cultural lives.

Step 5: Check and revise

As you research and write, your argument might change focus or direction as you learn more.

For this reason, it's often a good idea to wait until later in the writing process before you write the introduction paragraph—it can even be the very last thing you write.

When you've finished writing the essay body and conclusion, you should return to the introduction and check that it matches the content of the essay.

It's especially important to make sure your thesis statement accurately represents what you do in the essay. If your argument has gone in a different direction than planned, tweak your thesis statement to match what you actually say.

You can use the checklist below to make sure your introduction does everything it's supposed to.

Checklist: Essay introduction 0 / 5 My first sentence is engaging and relevant.

I have introduced the topic with necessary background information.

I have defined any important terms.

My thesis statement clearly presents my main point or argument.

Everything in the introduction is relevant to the main body of the essay. Well done! You have a strong introduction -

now make sure the rest of your essay is just as good. Learn more about writing essay paragraphs

More examples of essay introductions

Argumentative

Expository

Literary analysis This introduction to an argumentative essay sets up the debate about the internet and education, and then clearly states the position the essay will argue for. Argumentative essay introduction The spread of the internet has had a world-changing effect, not least on the world of education. The use of the internet in academic contexts is on the rise, and its role in learning is hotly debated. For many teachers who did not grow up with this technology, its effects seem alarming and potentially harmful. This concern, while understandable, is misguided. The negatives of internet use are outweighed by its critical benefits for students and educators—“as a uniquely comprehensive and accessible information source; a means of exposure to and engagement with different perspectives; and a highly flexible learning environment. This introduction to a short expository essay leads into the topic (the invention of the printing press) and states the main point the essay will explain (the effect of this invention on European society). Expository essay introduction In many ways, the invention of the printing press marked the end of the Middle Ages. The medieval period in Europe is often remembered as a time of intellectual and political stagnation. Prior to the Renaissance, the average person had very limited access to books and was unlikely to be literate. The invention of the printing press in the 15th century allowed for much less restricted circulation of information in Europe, paving the way for the Reformation. This introduction to a literary analysis essay, about Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, starts by describing a simplistic popular view of the story, and then states how the author will give a more complex analysis of the text’s literary devices. Literary analysis essay introduction Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein is often read as a crude cautionary tale. Arguably the first science fiction novel, its plot can be read as a warning about the dangers of scientific advancement unrestrained by ethical considerations. In this reading, and in popular culture representations of the character as a “mad scientist”, Victor Frankenstein represents the callous, arrogant ambition of modern science. However, far from providing a stable image of the character, Shelley uses shifting narrative perspectives to gradually transform our impression of Frankenstein, portraying him in an increasingly negative light as the novel goes on. While he initially appears to be a naive but sympathetic idealist, after the creature’s narrative Frankenstein begins to resemble—“even in his own telling—the thoughtlessly cruel figure the

creature represents him as.

Frequently asked questions about the essay introduction

Reference

[CORTICOBASAL SYNDROME: Guide for Patients, Families, Caregivers, & Medical Professionals \(Dementia Types, Symptoms, Stages, & Risk Factors\)](#)

[LSD: The Wonder Child: The Golden Age of Psychedelic Research in the 1950s](#)