

# WRITING AN INTRODUCTION

The writer's introduction sets up the paper. It outlines what will be discussed and establishes any scenarios that need clarifying. It should capture the reader's attention while establishing your argument in the paper.

Here is a template to use when writing introductions. Have your tutees look for these four elements in their introduction. Have them find what parts they are missing and how they can add them into their paper.

## The Rhetoric of Introductions<sup>1</sup>

Introductions have four common elements:

1. A statement of the **status quo** or the state of affairs that gives rise to the problem. The status quo is not background information; instead, it is the statement of general interpretation of a text that most readers agree with, the idea you will argue against. Creating a status quo is an easy and useful way to prepare readers not only for your problem but for the discussion of the response to the problem.
2. A statement of the **problem** that complicates, challenges, destabilizes or disrupts status quo.
3. A statement of the **associated cost** of the problem (a statement of what's at stake or why the problem matters)--either the cost of leaving the problem unresolved or the benefit of resolving the problem.
4. A statement of the **response** to the problem. In an academic essay that deals with conceptual problems, the response is often the main claim.

### The Cues for Rhetorical Elements of an Introduction

1. Most readers agree.....
2. However.....
3. This is important because.....
4. Thesis statement or main claim.....

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<sup>1</sup> Writing principles originally from Joseph M. Williams & Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Longman, 2007. Modified by and taken from Karlyn Crowley, *Argument and Writing Handout*, "The Rhetoric of Introductions." Page 4.

### **Sample Introduction**<sup>2</sup>:

*The sample introduction below is deliberately brief. Each sentence could be atomized and expanded into more.*

**Status quo:** Some viewers of the film *The Apostle* despise the lead character and minister, Sonny. Despite potential signs of transformation, they claim that he not only deceives his family and congregation, but also himself. From this perspective, Sonny is a violent, even evil man who does not resemble the man of God he claims to be. **Problem & costs:** However, by neglecting the importance of the scene in which Sonny baptizes himself and actually begins to behave in ways congruent with his spiritual calling, viewers miss the possibility of redemption in the film. **Response/claim:** Though Sonny has cheated on his wife and been violent to his family, he gives viewers a rare opportunity to witness how such a man can still be a channel for his religion, not despite his sins, but because of them.

### **Fairy Tales & Introductory Rhetorical Cues:**

Cinderella: **Status Quo:** Cinderella's mother and father were alive, and they had a happy life. **Destabilizing Moment:** Cinderella's parents died, and she was left to live with her mean step-mother and step-sisters. **Consequences:** She cannot go to the ball, and thus cannot escape the grasp of the mean step-sisters. **Resolution:** Her fairy godmother shows up, turns a pumpkin into a carriage, gives her a great dress, etc., so that she can meet Prince

Little Red Riding Hood: **Status Quo:** Little Red Riding Hood is a happy girl with a fabulous outfit. **Destabilizing Moment:** Her grandmother gets sick, and Little Red Riding Hood is sent out to bring her cookies. **Consequences:** She runs into the Big Bad Wolf, who eats her grandmother and then LRRH herself. **Resolution:** A huntsman passes by, hears the wolf snoring, and grows suspicious. He kills the wolf and liberates LRRH and her grandmother from the wolf's stomach.

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<sup>2</sup> Writing principles originally from Joseph M. Williams & Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Longman, 2007. Modified by and taken from Karlyn Crowley, *Argument and Writing Handout*, "Sample Introductions." Page 5-6.

## **Exercise: Identifying Parts of an Introduction<sup>3</sup>**

Directions: Identify the Status Quo, Problem, Costs, and Response/Solution (Main Claim) of the following:

1. The Simpsons seems to be the story of a fractured, chaotic, sometimes violent family. However, this interpretation fails to explain why the Simpson family does so many things together: vacations, family dinners, and church. If we continue to see The Simpsons merely as a dysfunctional family, we'll never understand the show's real meaning and appeal. In fact, The Simpsons represents a very traditional approach to family values.
2. Lots of people think that being some sort of vegetarian is the only humane and moral option for animal lovers. They fail to take into account the full range of farming techniques and livestock-raising schemes available in the United States. Until they cease to be so single-minded, vegetarians will never recognize their natural political allies. Organic and free-range farming are humane and moral options for animal-lovers.
3. Pure bred dogs and their owners are sometimes the object of jokes; lots of people think that small dogs like poodles are funny, and that owners who participate in dog shows are crazy for spending so much time on animals. Still, dog shows have become increasingly popular; last year's Westminster Kennel Club show drew over 4.5 million viewers a night on cable. As long as we believe that dog shows are a joke, we'll never be able to understand the mainstream American obsessions that they tap into. Dog shows and pure bred dog ownership are a brilliant combination of competition and affection.

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<sup>3</sup> Writing principles originally from Joseph M. Williams & Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Longman, 2007. Modified by and taken from Karlyn Crowley, *Argument and Writing Handout*, "Sample Introductions." Page 4.

## Introduction Template<sup>4</sup>

**Status Quo** State common but incorrect or incomplete assumptions.

Many people think \_\_\_\_\_.

Or

At first glance, it may seem like \_\_\_\_\_.

**Problem (Destabilizes Status Quo)** Describe something that reveals the status quo assumptions to be incomplete or inaccurate.

This initial perception fails to take into account \_\_\_\_\_.

or

This theory can't explain \_\_\_\_\_

or

People have failed to notice, however,  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**Costs (The Consequences of your Problem)** Show readers why they should care: what bad things will happen if people continue to believe the status quo? What good things will happen once they stop believing it?

If we continue to believe \_\_\_\_\_, we'll never understand the larger question of \_\_\_\_\_.

or

Unless we change \_\_\_\_\_, we will continue to have trouble with \_\_\_\_\_.

or

Once we understand \_\_\_\_\_, we'll begin to see the answer to the problem \_\_\_\_\_.

or

By rethinking our approach to \_\_\_\_\_, we can fix \_\_\_\_\_.

**Main Claim (Solution to Problem)** Provide a better theory/explanation to replace the status quo. State your claim.

Therefore, \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>4</sup> Writing principles originally from Joseph M. Williams & Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Longman, 2007. Modified by and taken from Karlyn Crowley, *Argument and Writing Handout*, "Template." Page 5.