



## Writing an introduction

The introduction provides an overview of your essay for the reader: it outlines the focus and argument of your essay, case study or report. It also gives some background/context to the topic, tells the reader why it matters, states your position and summarises your main points.

A well-written introduction sets the tone of your essay and lets the reader know what to expect. If your introduction does not have a clear argument and a direct outline of what is to come, it can leave the reader confused for the entire essay.

## How do you structure an introduction?

### Introductions include

- An **opening sentence** about the topic that gets your readers' attention, but is not too specifically linked to your argument.
- Some **background** information, which places the topic in context.
- A sentence that establishes the **relevance** of the topic e.g. a current issue or problem that you will be exploring.
- A definition of a key term (optional).
- A **thesis statement** – the position you will argue (refer to our academic skills resource on writing a thesis statement for more information).

- An **outline** of the topics you will cover to develop your argument.
- A **closing sentence** that links to your next paragraph and relates to your main topic.

The introduction moves from general statements to ones more focused on the specific details of the essay at the end.

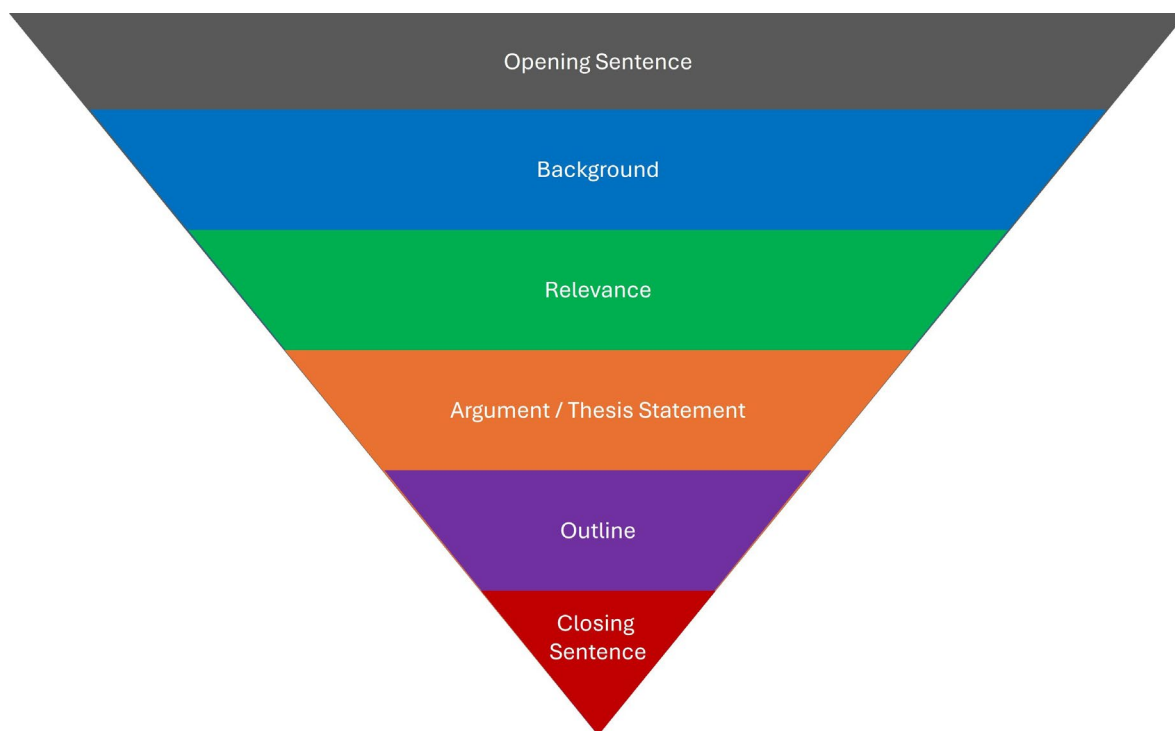


Figure 1: Structure of an introduction.

Image long description: the structure of an introduction shown as an inverted triangle split into 6 sections. In order, the sections include a grey band containing the words "Opening Sentence", a blue band containing the word "Background", a green band with the word "Relevance", an orange band with the words "Argument / Thesis Statement", a purple band with the word "Outline", and a maroon band containing the words "Closing Sentence". The triangle represents the introduction moving from broad statements at the start to more focused statements at the end.

## Things to consider

Before you start writing, make sure you fully understand the question and what is expected of you.

Then ask yourself:

- (Background) What broader ideas or information do I need for my argument to make sense and feel substantial? The context you set should reflect the concerns of the unit you are studying.
- (Relevance) Why am I talking about this now, or in this way?
- (Argument) What am I trying to do? Where am I going?
- (Outline) How am I going to get there? Come up with a series of short statements that correspond to the ideas (i.e. the paragraphs) that will be explored in the essay.

For more on structuring paragraphs, refer to our academic skills resource about writing paragraphs.

Dot-point all the things you want to include. Place them in order and then begin forming sentences.

Think of it as an introduction to 'your argument', rather than 'the topic'. This will keep you from getting distracted by unnecessary information.

### Example of a good introduction

#### Question:

*Injuries sustained during extreme sports should not be treated at publicly-funded hospitals. Write an essay considering this proposition.*

#### Introduction:

Australia operates a multi-payer healthcare scheme that balances a universal public system with an incentivised private insurance market. The public Medicare program provides high-quality medical care at low- or no-cost to eligible residents, funded by a means-tested levy paid through the tax system. A 2024 study by the American non-profit foundation The Commonwealth Fund ranked Australia's system the best in the world, ahead of the Netherlands, United Kingdom and New Zealand (Commonwealth Fund, 2024). Recently, however, following some high-profile cases of injuries sustained by extreme sports practitioners, there has been renewed debate about whether no-cost emergency care exploits goodwill to support injury or illness that is suffered by the unfortunate, when it is invoked to treat injuries that some regard as reckless. This essay will consider the social limits of publicly-funded medical care in Australia as it is applied to voluntary recreational activities with elevated risks of injury, and will argue that the public health system has a duty to treat all injuries regardless of personal culpability. It will discuss the foundation and cost base of the public-health system in Australia, analyse the rate of injury in several of the most popular extreme sports, demonstrate the ineffectiveness of an increased point-of-access excess in deterrence, and consider the cost involved in assessing and determining culpability in such cases. It will show that despite a notional increase in public concern over "avoidable" recreational injuries, Australia's current approach to extreme sport injuries should be continued.

← Opening Sentence

← Background

← Relevance

← Argument / Thesis Statement

← Outline

← Closing Sentence

Figure 2: Example of an introduction.

Image long description: an example of an introduction with different coloured text for each component. Grey text labelled "Opening Sentence" reads: "Australia operates a multi-payer healthcare scheme that balances a universal public system with an incentivised private insurance market." This is followed by blue text labelled as "Background" that reads: "The public Medicare program provides high-quality medical care at low- or no-cost to eligible residents, funded by a means-tested levy paid through the tax system. A 2024 study by the American non-profit foundation The Commonwealth Fund ranked Australia's system as the best in the world, ahead of the Netherlands, United Kingdom and New Zealand (Commonwealth Fund, 2024)." This is followed by green text labelled "Relevance": "Recently, however, following some high-profile cases of injuries sustained by extreme sports practitioners, there has been renewed debate about whether no-cost emergency care exploits goodwill to support injury or illness that is suffered by the unfortunate, when it is invoked to treat injuries that some regard as reckless." Followed by orange text labelled "Argument / Thesis Statement": "This essay will consider the social limits of publicly-funded medical care in Australia as it is applied to voluntary recreational activities with elevated risks of injury, and will argue that the public health system has a duty to treat all injuries regardless of personal culpability." Followed by purple text labelled

*"Outline": "It will discuss the foundation and cost base of the public-health system in Australia, analyse the rate of injury in several of the most popular extreme sports, demonstrate the ineffectiveness of an increased point-of-access excess in deterrence, and consider the cost involved in assessing and determining culpability in such cases." Lastly, red text labelled "Closing Sentence": "It will show that despite a notional increase in public concern over 'avoidable' recreational injuries, Australia's current approach to extreme sports injuries should be continued."*

### **Tips for writing introductions**

- The introduction is usually about 10% of your essay and forms one paragraph. For a report, or anything with subheadings, it can be a little longer; but one paragraph is usually appropriate.
- When writing the first draft of your introduction, don't worry about getting it 'perfect'. Just get your ideas down. You can edit the expression and punctuation later.
- Learn from the work of others. Pay attention to how established writers begin journal articles and book chapters. Explore their structure, use of connecting words, and overall academic language and style.

## **When do you write the introduction?**

It's a good idea to write a preliminary introduction at the beginning of the writing process; however, you should always revise it before submitting. Your argument and writing style are likely to develop during the writing process, so make sure to go back to the beginning once you have finished writing your first draft.

Another technique is to try writing the introduction and conclusion together. This makes it easier to establish clear links between the two.

If possible, set your essay aside for a day or two. Re-read your essay, then re-write the introduction. This enables you to write with fresh eyes.

### **Tips**

- Proofreading is very important. Look for spelling (Australian English), grammar, typing errors, repetitive wording, paragraph length and linking words.
- Leave plenty of time for editing. Try to finish writing in advance so you can take a couple of days away from it and then edit your work with a clear mind.