# Guide to Writing an Introductory Paragraph and Outline

Every well-written college essay includes an engaging introduction that interests readers and a clear thesis that states the purpose of the essay. A well-written essay is also organized and follows a logical outline. Visit the Writing Center’s “[Writing a Paper](http://writingcenter.ashford.edu/writing-a-paper)” page for additional review of the steps listed here.

## Writing an Introduction

The introduction to a paper is a very important section in that it sets the expectations of the reader. The introduction is generally the first paragraph of an essay. Although there is no one formula for constructing a good introduction, an introduction to an essay should accomplish the following:

* **Attract the reader's attention.** Magazine and newspaper articles often accomplish this with brief but interesting anecdotes, questions that pique the reader's curiosity, something of personal relevance to the reader, or other apt quotations, provocative questions, or statements. While you shouldn't feel that you have to sensationalize, neither should you assume that the reader is interested in what you have to say by default. Very often just raising the interesting issue that your thesis explores is enough to pull your reader in.
* **State your thesis (controlling idea).** After reading the introduction, the reader should have no doubt of the central point of your paper and what you are trying to prove. Your thesis is typically the last one or two sentences of your introduction.

* **Establish the significance of your point to the reader.** Convince your audience that they should care about what you have to say. This is achieved through an engaging introduction and [successful thesis.](http://www2.hmc.edu/%7Ealves/thesis.html)
* **Preview how you are going to support your thesis.** Support your thesis by summarizing your main points. This prepares your reader for your arguments and improves the readers’ recognition and retention of those points.

## Writing a Thesis Statement (Controlling Idea)

Now that you have your reader’s attention, state the purpose of your essay, otherwise known as your thesis or controlling idea. The purpose of your thesis varies by essay topic (argumentative, persuasive, cause and effect, personal essay, and so on). In your thesis you need to state

1. your topic
2. your argument on the topic
3. how you intend to prove your argument.

A simple equation for a personal essay thesis might look something like this:

*Because of X, Y, and Z,* ***Topic,*** *I now believe/think/feel/know/etc**A, B, and/or C****.***

Here are two helpful templates you may use to build your thesis for your personal essay:

*Because of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I learned that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I never realized \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ until \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

**Specific topic** + *your opinion or the claim*+ the reasons you have for making that claim = Thesis You can structure your thesis something like this: **Topic** is [*opinion*] because of X, Y, and Z.

or

*Because of X, Y, and Z*, **Topic** is/can be seen as/should/should not *[opinion]*

**Now you try creating a thesis!**

Try adding a thesis like this to the end of your introduction.

## Writing an Outline

Finally, after you have written an interesting introduction and a clear thesis, you need to be sure to organize your paper in the most effective and logical manner.