Introductory Paragraphs

The **LAST** step in writing a paper is to add an introductory paragraph which

- **Orients the reader** to the specific topic being discussed (i.e. not “abortion” but “Thomson’s argument in favor of abortion rights” and not “Plato’s Republic,” but “Plato’s argument for immaterial forms in chapter III of the Republic”),
- **Tells the reader** in broad conceptual terms what the topic is (e.g. Plato appeals to the distinction between the corruptible and the incorruptible to argue that blah blah blah), and finally
- **Gives the reader a sense of what you’ll have to say** about that topic.

**Why last?** Well, the introduction tells your reader what they’re about to read and often you don’t know what you’re about to write, so you clearly have no business telling your reader what they’re about to read! 🙄 We want to wait until we know what our thesis is, what our chief complaint/worry is, what the argument we’re analyzing is really saying, etc. before we dive in and introduce our paper to our reader.

**Two quick notes:**

- Please **do not start with a "hook"**. You do not need to convince your reader that your paper is worth reading. Just go straight to "One argument in favor of gun control uses the purported fact that guns tend to escalate non-lethal confrontations to make the case that we should support policies which curtail the ownership of firearms or at minimum the carrying of firearms in public places." That's your first sentence.
- In that vein, avoid at all costs using a vacuous statement like "Since the dawn of time…" or "Ever since we were able to surgically terminate a pregnancy, people have been arguing over its moral status." First of all, many of these statements end up being false, and that’s no good. Second, at best your reader already knows and so hasn’t learned anything and is already checking out after your first sentence. **Start specific, stay specific, and try your darndest never to write anything that your reader doesn’t already obviously know.**

**Using this Document:**

I’ve got a few sample intros in the proceeding pages. Read through them along with my analysis and then craft your own intro for your Analytical Essay. **Simple is better than complex and unsuccessful.** We want an intro that keys us into the topic of the paper, so it’s fine if it doesn’t do anything more than that. No points marked down, no penalties, you’ve done exactly what you were supposed to.

If you want to grow a bit and are comfortable with the first version, aim for the second example. If you have this totally down and are bored with writing really basic intros, look at the third example, but do so with caution. It’s hard to do it well.

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1Kevin Lande deserves credit for the conception of this handout. I merely took his idea and personalized it. Always cite your sources!
Basic, Perfectly Acceptable, Good Introduction (do this unless you’re very confident):

(1) In Plato’s *The Republic*, Socrates argues that a just person is happy and an unjust person unhappy. (2) He appeals to the link between virtue and the successful fulfillment of a function, particularizing this structure to the human case. (3) For us, Justice is the virtue that enables us to live well and so to be happy. (4) Though his argument is compelling, I will raise a worry about his definition of function and then discuss the effect this worry has on Socrates’ argument.

Breakdown:

(1) Orients the reader to the source text and the conclusion of the argument in question. It avoids gendered language and isn’t a broad statement about the history of philosophy.

(2) Tells us about the concepts from the first part of the argument and roughly how they are linked.

(3) Moves the argument forward by telling us about the concepts in second part of the argument and roughly how they are connected.

(4) Introduces a worry without sounding too confident in the force of one’s worry. Tells us specifically what is wrong (i.e. which premise) without including too many details.

Slightly More Ambitious Introduction (aim here if you’re comfortable with the first version):

(1) Socrates, as he appears in Plato’s *The Republic*, argues that a person’s justice and their happiness are linked such that a just person is a happy person. He appeals to the general claim that virtues enable agents to function well, applying it to the human case for which he argues Justice is the virtue which enables humans to live well. Claiming further that living well leads to happiness, Socrates concludes that the just person is happy. (2) After presenting his argument, I will argue that his definition of function fails to ascribe functions in certain cases where there clearly is a function and ascribes functions in cases where it is questionable at best that there is a function at all.

Breakdown:

(1) This introduction has many of the virtues of the first, but includes more specific information about the conceptual structure of the argument and presents a more complete picture.

(2) The Objection is also clearer in that the particular fault is introduced rather than just the premise being objected to. We get a very short analysis of the objection. The reader gets a fuller sense of what will be argued for later in the paper.

Very Ambitious Introduction (Quite risky in that it’s easy to do this unsuccessfully):
(1) It is tempting to think that one can be just or unjust without any affect on one's happiness. Reflection on the examples of martyrs and others who engage in self-sacrifice for the sake of justice seems to reveal to us that there is no connection between doing what is right or just and being happy. In fact it sometimes appears to be the case that the more just one is, the less happy will one be. (2) Socrates, as he appears in Plato's *The Republic*, argues that this is not the case. Rather than being orthogonal or negatively correlated, a person's justice and their happiness are linked such that a just person is a happy person. (3) He appeals to the general claim that virtues enable agents to function well, applying it to the human case for which he argues Justice is the virtue which enables humans to live well. Claiming further that living well leads to happiness, Socrates concludes that the just person is happy. (4) After presenting his argument, I will argue that his definition of function fails to ascribe functions in certain cases where there clearly is a function and ascribes functions in cases where it is questionable at best that there is a function at all.

**Breakdown:**

(1) This introduction has many of the virtues of the second, but also includes an intuitive hook (but note well: this is a specific hook which gives the reader some real content to think about). The hook isn't a broad, sweeping generalization or a vacuous claim. Instead, it has substantive content and presents the tension between one's pretheoretical intuitions about happiness and justice and Socrates' conclusion.

(2) The introduction to the text and the conclusion stands in contrast to the intuitive hook. The reader is now interested in Socrates' argument because his conclusion is counterintuitive.

(3) The reader is now given a conceptual introduction to the argument akin to that in the second example. At this point, the reader is interested in how the conclusion is derived and gets a clear picture of what sorts of assumptions they are asked to take on board. They aren't given too many details, though, so they're keen to read the paper to find out more.

(4) This is essentially identical to the second example. The reader gets a clear sense of what might have gone wrong in Socrates' argument.