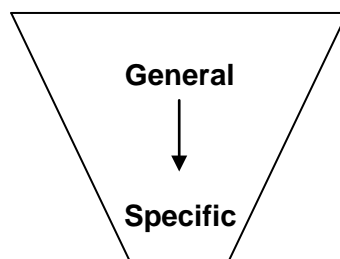


## WRITING INTRODUCTIONS

The introduction is important as the first part of a piece of writing. It sets the tone for the reader; provides information on the content and your position; and shows how the writing is organised. It may be one or more paragraphs depending on the length of the assignment. It will be 5% - 10% of the total text.

Introductions usually start with a general statement about the topic, and they are then built up gradually with more specific statements on the background, purpose and the content of the writing. As you write the introduction, you need to remember that you are trying to direct the reader to focus on the topic and your main ideas.



The introduction consists of different elements (see below) and you might use all of these elements in your introduction to a long piece of writing such as a dissertation or research paper. Other shorter assignments such as essays or seminar reports would use only a few of the elements while the introduction to an exam question would be very short and direct.

### Elements of an introduction

- a) **initial focus**
- b) **the background**
- c) **the central issue(s) to be discussed**
- d) **definition(s) of key terms**
- e) **position statement**
- f) **the justification**
- g) **the aim**
- h) **limitations in the scope of your essay / research paper**
- i) **overview of the structure**

These 9 elements can be grouped into three main aspects.

## ASPECT 1 Information your reader needs to know

**a) initial focus:** The first introductory sentence should be a general statement about the topic and it should contain **words which link back** to the title. This enables the reader to focus on the topic moving from a general statement which establishes the context of your study, to the more specific statements later in your introduction about the focus of your research paper.

**b) the background :** This section provides a context for your piece of writing. It answers the question: *What special factors make the topic important?*

These special background factors could be:-

- developments and changes
- new trends in this field
- problems with existing
- gaps in existing laws

**c) the central issue(s) to be discussed:** You need to identify and briefly indicate the issue(s), problem(s) that you will explore, discuss or resolve

**d) definition(s) of key terms:** You may want to include definitions of key terms or concepts that you will use in your writing.

## ASPECT 2 Your viewpoint on the issue

**e) thesis (position) statement :** Your central argument or claim about the main issue/problem is stated in one or more sentences.. It is a pivotal statement. By stating your position, you are indicating the focus and direction of arguments in your writing.

**f) the justification:** You may need to point out why the issue is important, why research is necessary, or why you hold a certain position about the topic.

## ASPECT 3 A guide for your reader

**g) the aim:** You should outline your purpose in investigating / discussing this area.

**h) limitations in the scope of your essay/research paper:** This is a statement of the boundaries of your research, i.e. the areas of the topic that your research does not address.

**i) overview of the structure:** An overview of the content of the parts / sections of your paper tells the reader how your essay / dissertation / research paper will be organised.

## EVALUATING INTRODUCTIONS

Consider which of the elements you might use in writing a short introduction to this essay.

Critically evaluate the use of seminars for law students.

**Here are three short introductions to the essay. Which is the most effective? What are the problems with the other introductions?** (see answers on next page)

- 1** A good way of revising and discussing subjects that have been taught during a lecture is the seminar. Almost every two weeks students have to prepare themselves for seminars with the reading list which they are given by the tutor. They are usually divided into groups of eight to ten persons. Each group has an hour to answer and discuss questions about the issues. This essay aims to look at the advantages and disadvantages of seminars for law students.
- 2** In this essay I will describe the use of seminars for law students. A seminar is a group discussion where we put forward our points of view about the subject. Our seminars are usually monitored by a seminar-taker. It is an open forum where the students discuss a given topic. I have been to several seminars.
- 3** There are several means by which law students may be taught in the university such as lectures, tutorials and seminars. Among these, seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods as they offer students the opportunity to interact with tutors and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas. Despite the benefits, there is, however, a negative side to the use of seminars as a teaching tool. This essay will evaluate the use of seminars for teaching under-graduate and postgraduate students of law by examining the positive aspects and the weaknesses of this method of instruction.

Three aspects of an introduction: Adapted from Godwin, J. (2009) *Planning your Essay* Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan

## ANSWERS

- 1 A good way of revising and discussing subjects that have been taught during a lecture is the seminar. Almost every two weeks students have to prepare themselves for seminars with the reading list which they are given by the tutor. They are usually divided into groups of eight to ten persons. Each group has an hour to answer and discuss questions about the issues. This essay aims to look at the advantages and disadvantages of seminars for law students.

**Weak introduction: Although the first sentence provides a definition which helps the reader to focus on the subject, the next three sentences contain too much detail about seminars which would be more appropriate in the main body. The last sentence refers to advantages and disadvantages which suggests that the student does not fully understand what the essay is asking him to do.**

- 2 In this essay I will describe the use of seminars for law students. Our seminars are usually monitored by a seminar-taker. It is an open forum where the students discuss a given topic. I have been to several seminars.

**Poor introduction: The first sentence is an attempt to give the purpose of the essay but this should be in the last part of the introduction - not in the beginning. In addition, this first statement shows a misunderstanding of the title with the use of 'describe' (not evaluate). The other sentences give information about seminars which would be better in the main body. Overall, the style is too personal with 'I' and 'our'.**

- 3 There are several means by which law students may be taught in the university such as lectures, tutorials and seminars. Among these, seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods as they offer students the opportunity to interact with tutors and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas. Despite these benefits, there is, however, a negative side to the use of seminars as a teaching tool. This essay will evaluate the use of seminars for teaching under-graduate and post-graduate students of law by examining the positive aspects and the weaknesses of this method of instruction.

**Good introduction: This introduction provides the reader with a clear idea about the content and structure of the essay. It is carefully built up, moving from a general statement in the beginning to the specific statement of purpose at the end. The writer's viewpoint on the effectiveness of seminars is clearly stated and the acknowledgment of the 'negative side' of seminars indicates that it will be a balanced essay with both sides of the argument being presented.**