

## **How to Write an Introduction**

The purpose of an introduction in a technical paper is to frame the subject of the paper, and give the reader a road map to the structure of the paper. Think of your introduction as a kind of instruction for the reader. It helps the reader understand how you want them to think about your topic, and how the paper will be structured. A strong introduction helps immensely making the organization of the paper clear to both you and your reader.

Many of you were taught the inverted triangle intro, where you start general and focus in to the specific thesis statement in the last sentence. This style is almost never used in the professional or technical world. Instead, start strong. Your very first sentence needs to convince me to read the paper. So there should be no bland, "Many factors are important in thinking about climate change" kind of openings.

### **DO:**

- Use the intro to frame the problem or question that the paper addresses
- Be very direct – no suspense or hinting around
- Make sure that all the topics addressed in the paper are mentioned in the intro IN THE ORDER in which you talk about them in the paper

### **DO NOT:**

- Start with an anecdote or other device to “catch the reader’s interest”. Assume that your readers are serious people with a serious interest in environmental issues. You attract their interest with a strong clear thesis that tells them exactly what the paper is about without wasting their time.
- Use your introduction to review the history of the issue. That gets its own section.
- Use your introduction to review the basic geology of your issue. Assume your reader knows the basic geology, and anything more advanced gets its own section.
- Talk about your paper as “this paper will”. Just do it, don’t talk about it.

The kind of introduction you will write for this paper is appropriate in many professional settings. If you expand it a bit, it can be an executive summary – very common on longer reports.

Your introduction should do **three** things, in this order:

1. **Frame the problem in strong, direct language.** The point of the essay should be right there in the first two sentences or so.

THESIS: Nuclear power has the greatest potential of any energy source to arrest and perhaps reverse climate change.

2. **Provide context for the thesis:**

CONTEXT: Nuclear power is the only energy source that can provide uninterrupted energy with minimal carbon emissions. Despite public fears, nuclear power has proven to be safe and relatively inexpensive.

3. **Preview the structure of the paper.**

**Do not** do the studenty thing of saying, "this essay will discuss this issue. First it will do this, then it will do that, then finally it will do this other thing." That is acceptable writing, but it is not sophisticated writing. It is preferable to preview the structure of the paper by actually making the arguments very briefly, in the order you will discuss them in the paper:

PREVIEW: Nuclear power is attractive in three respects: economically, environmentally, and geopolitically. Electricity generated by nuclear power plants compares in cost to that generated by coal-fired plants. Even with the Chernobyl disaster, nuclear power is responsible for far less environmental damage than coal-fired or petroleum-fired power plants. Geopolitically, nuclear power is very attractive; the U.S. controls the great majority of the world's uranium ores. However some challenges remain, including the two most critical issues: long-term disposal of nuclear waste, and security of nuclear materials.

Here I have told you exactly what the paper is about, what arguments you can expect to read, and the order you will read them in. Aim for 3/4 to 1 page long for the entire intro.