

Writing Introductions

Some Dos and Don'ts for Introductions

The introduction sets the stage, stimulates interest, and focuses the reader for what lies ahead. Here are some quick dos and don'ts for writing introductions.

Do

- use an "introductory device:" give background information, use an anecdote, provide statistics, ask a provocative question, use an appropriate quotation, make a useful analogy, define a term, or identify the situation
- make sure that your introduction is no longer than 15% of the total paper (i.e. for a three-page paper the introduction should be between ¼ to 1/3 of the first page)
- include a thesis statement that gives the central idea of the paper-what is this paper going to "prove;" what is your opinion on this subject?
- check to make sure that you are happy with the scope and depth of the thesis assertions and the clarity of its context.
- Are you comfortable with the direction your thesis points?
- Do you feel that you will be able to justify, support and prove this very crucial main idea?
- Example
The first paragraph in the following article "Reinterpreting John" is a successful introduction: it gives some background information (thoughts about the origin of John before discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls); gives the contemporary ideas ("Today"); and concludes with the author's major idea for this article.

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many scholars considered the Fourth Gospel-the Gospel According to John-to be a mid-to-late second century composition inspired by Greek philosophy. Today, 45 years later, a growing scholarly consensus finds John to be a first-century composition. More surprising still, it is perhaps the most Jewish of the Gospels. Elements that were once thought to be reflections of Greek philosophy were all there at the time in contemporaneous Palestine (Charlesworth 19).

Don't

- be too obvious by saying something like "in this paper I will. . ."

- apologize and state that "I am not sure if I'm right but . . ."
- use trite expressions such as "haste makes waste."
- Example: Think about how much weaker the above paragraph would be if I were to use a trite expression, apologize, and be too obvious (in bold print).

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many scholars considered the Fourth Gospel-the Gospel According to John-to be a mid-to-late second century composition inspired by Greek philosophy. Today, 45 years later, a growing scholarly consensus finds John to be a first-century composition. More surprising still, it is perhaps the most Jewish of the Gospels. **I may not know much about this, but in this paper I will talk about the fact that the elements that were once thought to be reflections of Greek philosophy were all there at the time in contemporaneous Palestine. Not even the writers of the Gospels invented the wheel!** (Ibid.)

Last, but certainly not least!

Do

After you finish the first draft of your paper, go back to your introduction and make sure that the details in the body expand and "prove" your thesis.

Charlesworth, James. "Reinterpreting John: How the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Revolutionized Our Understanding of the Gospel of John." *Bible Review* vol IX (Feb 1993):18-26.