

## How to write an academic essay: Crafting a good introduction

Once you have read the question, selected the key words and phrases and decided on a direction of argument, you need to begin constructing your essay. You will start by writing your introduction (Remember **not** to include a **heading** here – English academic essays do not contain headings).

An introductory paragraph frames the entire essay and is important because it:

1. Captures the interest of the reader.
2. Introduces the main argument, texts and interests of the paper.
3. Provides an expectation for the rest of the essay.

It needs to, then, contain the following items:

### A Hook

- This is normally the first sentence or two of the essay, which has a wide contextual meaning, but opens the reader and the essay up to new ideas.
- An example of a hook could be:
  - The extract taken from the novel *Midnight's Children*, by Salman Rushdie, allows for interesting textual analysis. Saleem Sinai, as the main character and narrator, is a colourful, complex character with contrasting views of himself.
- As you can see from the two above sentences, there is an introduction to the topic (the primary text and its author) and a general statement whose only importance is to capture attention.

### Context

This will provide some insight as to the texts you are working with, as well as the area of interest or perspective of your approach towards the text.

- An example of such a context:

*Midnight's Children* is a historical novel, belonging to the sub-genre of magical realism. It is set around the time of India's independence from British rule, which makes it an important addition to the genre of post-colonial fiction.

### Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is important, as it will determine the primary argument or framing of an essay. It provides a guide to your argument for the reader. Because it acts as a guide to your argument, every statement you make in the body of your essay should tie back into your thesis statement.

- Thesis statements are not:
  - Titles (Characterisation in *Midnight's Children*)
  - Announcements (This essay will examine characterisation in Rushdie's *Midnight's children*)

- Is not the entire essay (A thesis statement should only be one or two sentences summarising the main idea/thought/claim/issue/argument of the essay, not the entire essay.)
- An example of a basic thesis statement would be:
  - Rushdie makes use of various poetic techniques to enhance visual imagery and create meaning. His use of tone and style changes with the pace of the passage, which is in tune with his readers.

### **Transition Statement**

A Transition Statement is not always necessary within the introduction paragraph. Nevertheless, such statements assist with the closing of a paragraph and provide an opening for a new paragraph's idea.

- If, for example, within this introduction, I decide to leave the paragraph as is, I will need to continue the line of thought from the previous paragraph into the new one. Therefore, the opening of the new paragraph will be:
  - This control of pace is very well executed in the opening sentences of the passage. The sentences are short and, because of the many punctuation marks, create the tension needed in the introduction to keep the reader interested. The tone of the passage is also one of excitement. The narrator is telling us about his birth, an exciting event in itself. Words like 'tumbled' and 'gasp' emphasise the excitement. The tone of the passage changes to a more sober one after he mentions his father breaking his toe. He states that this event paled in comparison to what he was to endure because of the political situation in India at the time. Evidence of a more negative tone can be found in the words, 'befallen', 'tyrannies, and 'no escape'. The pace of the passage changes at this point, with the sentences becoming longer and more descriptive, thereby slowing the pace down. This adds to the more sombre tone in the second half of the passage.

This is an example of an introduction that I created, in response to the essay question from last year's first assignment.

**Important!** When writing an essay for an assignment, you can and should always go back, after writing your conclusion, to reread your introduction and make sure that the thesis statement is still relevant to your argument. If you find that your argument has invalidated your thesis statement, rewrite your introduction!

**Also important!** In an examination, you will not have the time to go back and change your introduction if your argument mutates while you are writing, so make a point of going back and skim-reading your introduction after every couple of paragraphs you write for the body of your essay.