

Imagine that you are at the park with a friend, and your friend runs into a group of people that she knows from work. Excited to see them, your friend begins to talk with the group and forgets to introduce you. As the group talks, you try to figure out who they are by catching on to bits and pieces of the conversation. Eventually, your friend apologizes and quickly introduces you. Finally, you begin to feel as if you can participate in the conversation.

Just like you would be lost in the above scenario, your reader is likely to be lost if your paper doesn't include an introductory paragraph that introduces the reader to the topic. An introduction should do two main things:

1. **Gain interest in the topic, so your reader will think it is worth his or her time to continue reading the paper.**

There are many ways to do this. For example, you could give some unique or unknown history about the topic, create a scenario or story related to the topic, use a quotation that fits the content of your paper well, or ask a series of thought-provoking questions. **For examples of effective openers, read some of the opening paragraphs to the essays inside “WINK: An Online Journal” on this Online Writing Center web site.**

2. **Announce the topic of the paper.**

After you've gained your reader's interest, it's time to give the reader a sense of what the topic will be. In many cases, this is done with a thesis statement at the very end of the paragraph.

Thesis Statements

Imagine that some friends invite you over to watch a movie. When you ask directions to the house, they say, "Oh, it's a red house in La Crosse. I'm sure you'll find it."

Without clear directions, it would be difficult to make it to your final destination. In the same way, it's difficult to find the main point in a paper if the writer doesn't use a clear thesis statement. A thesis statement is like a road map to a paper, helping the reader to understand the direction in which the paper is going.

Location

In many cases, thesis statements appear as the **last sentence of the introduction** of the paper. After a writer catches the reader's attention in the introduction, the thesis gives the reader an idea of what to expect in the rest of the paper. Placing a thesis statement at the end of the introduction works best in informative writing, such as research papers or instructions.

There are times when a thesis appears later in the document. For example, in some narrative stories, the writer wants to keep the reader in suspense. Placing a thesis at the end of the introduction would ruin the suspense, so the writer may wait until the final paragraph to give an overall statement of what the story means. While placing a thesis statement somewhere other than introduction can be a powerful technique, it's important that the writer have a **specific reason** for doing so and that **the reason meets the purpose and audience of the paper**.

Types of Thesis Statements

A writer can choose from a variety of thesis statements, including:

- Announcement
- Forecast
- Question

A thesis statement written as an **announcement** has the following characteristics:

- It announces general main idea of the paper.
- It **does not** predict the main points of the paper.

It may read something like this: *Talking to plants is beneficial*. After seeing this statement, the reader would expect to read a paper that explains why talking to plants is a good thing.

A thesis statement written as a **forecast** has the following characteristics:

- It forecasts the main ideas of the paper.
- It **does** predict the specific main points of the paper.

For example, a thesis statement written as a forecast may say this: *Talking to plants is beneficial because it helps the plants to grow, gives oxygen to the environment, and makes humans happier*. After seeing this statement, the reader would expect to read about why talking to plants is beneficial for plants, the environment, and humans, in that specific order in the rest of the paper.

A thesis statement written as a **question** has the following characteristics:

- It asks the reader something related to the main point of the paper.
- It sets up an expectation that the question will be answered in the rest of the paper.

For example, a thesis statement written as a **question** may say this: *Why is it beneficial to talk to plants?* Then, throughout the rest of the paper, the reader would expect to read answers to that question.

Wording

To make good use of your reader's time, word your thesis statement as concisely as possible. Note the unnecessary words in the following thesis statements:

In this paper, I will discuss why it is beneficial to talk to plants.

I will tell you why it is beneficial to talk to plants.

The words in bold are unnecessary because your reader already knows that s/he is reading a paper, and your reader already knows that you will be discussing something in the paper. In addition, the bolded phrases sound as if the writer is talking to the reader, which is not true of written communication. So, to avoid these problems, just focus on the topic itself: *Talking to plants is beneficial.*

So, the next time you write a paper, don't forget to use your thesis as a road map to help readers to find their way around. Good luck!

© 2001-2010 by Tracy Helixon
Updated 5-7-2013