The introductory paragraph of an essay

The first paragraph of an essay should introduce the reader to the topic. It should also create interest in the essay, outline the writer’s main ideas and suggest how these ideas will be presented within the essay.

The essential parts of an introductory paragraph to your essay are:

- A hook
- Building sentences
- The thesis statement

To catch the reader’s attention, the first sentence of your essay should introduce the topic in an interesting way. This is known as a hook.

After the hook, the following sentences should contain definitions of key terms and relevant background information. These building sentences should ‘build’ towards the thesis statement.

The thesis statement comes at the end of the introduction. It is the most important sentence in the entire essay because it presents the essay topic and the writer’s position on that topic and it reveals the purpose or aim of the essay. It also indicates the main ideas (mapping scheme) that will be discussed in the body paragraphs.

More about the hook

A hook should encourage the reader to continue reading. It could be:

- An eye-catching statement – using an interesting idea
- A surprising statistic – for example a detail that is not widely known
- A quotation (by an expert on the topic)
- A general truth

More about building sentences

Building sentences provide background and introduce any ideas or information necessary for the reader to understand the thesis. Depending on the topic, building sentences might:

- Explain the history of the topic
- Define key terms
- Provide some statistics on the topic
- Mention the current situation regarding the topic
- Mention attitudes or opinions towards the topic
- Explain your approach to the topic

More about the thesis statement

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in the essay because it specifically states what the essay will be about. It should include:

- The topic of the essay
- The writer’s position, opinion or approach to the topic
- The main ideas that will develop and support the writer’s position

The thesis statement appears near the end of the introductory paragraph and, in short essays, is usually one sentence long, including or sometimes followed by the mapping scheme.

The main ideas are listed in the same order as they appear in the essay, which gives the reader a clear preview of what the following paragraphs will be about. It is useful to think of the thesis statement as the writer’s answer to an essay question. It provides a basic answer to the question and the rest of the essay will answer this in greater detail.

Example essay questions and possible thesis statements

**Question:**

Explain how an alternate form of energy is being used successfully in the world today.

**Thesis statement:**

Solar power is improving people’s lives in developing countries by providing efficient light safely, linking them to the global mobile community and increasing their independence.

This thesis statement shows that ‘solar power’ is the topic of the essay; the writer’s position on this topic is that it is ‘improving people’s lives in developing countries’; the three main ideas are ‘providing light safely’, ‘linking them to the global community’ and ‘increasing their independence’. Each of the main ideas (mapping scheme) would be explained in each of the body paragraphs of the essay.

**Question:**

Analyse the growth of Apple’s market share since the introduction of the iMac.

**Thesis statement:**

The rapid growth of Apple’s market share since the introduction of the iMac was due to a number of innovations in design, manufacturing and marketing.

As above the topic is ‘Apple’s market share since the introduction of the iMac’ and the writer’s position is that it ‘was due to a number of innovations in design, manufacturing and marketing’. The writer may use each of design, manufacturing and marketing as the three main ideas (mapping scheme) to be developed in each paragraph of the essay.