

## Approaches to Writing Introductions

Each of the introductions below presents the same thesis statement: "Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime." While the thesis statement is the same for all of the introductions, notice how the various introductions set different tones for the essay and establish slightly different expectations for what will follow in the body of the essay.

### 1. Begin with Background or Historical Information

#### Example\*

Identity theft is not a new crime. Throughout history, unscrupulous individuals have pretended to be people they are not, often with the goal of political, social, or financial gain. With the right appearance and demeanor, people have falsely presented themselves as kings and bishops. Today, in our information age, identity theft is a far more prevalent problem. With access to names, Social Security numbers, and other personal information, thieves are able to steal identities, leaving the victims struggling to clear their good names. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

### 2. Begin with a Quotation

#### Example

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago claims that he "who steals my purse steals trash / . . . But he that filches from me my good name / Robs me of that which not enriches him, / And makes me poor indeed" (3.3.157-161). Today, identity theft is a new way that thieves steal both the "purses" and the good names of innocent victims, and these thieves are enriching themselves at the expense of their victims. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

### 3. Begin with an Interesting or Surprising Fact

#### Example

Identity fraud is the fastest growing crime in the United States. In 2004, over nine million Americans, or approximately one person in 24, became victims of identity fraud or identity theft, at a cost to the economy of 52.6 billion dollars ("2005 Identity Fraud Survey Report"). Because many cases of identity fraud and identity theft may go unreported, the numbers could be even higher. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

The information on this handout was taken from <http://www2.ivcc.edu/rambo/eng1001/introductions.htm>.  
\*The information in this example is not cited because it summarizes the evidence and points given in the body paragraphs.

#### **4. Begin with a Scholarly Definition of an Important Term**

##### Example

Our identity is what makes us unique. It is "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual" (Franklin 55), and when one is a victim of identity theft, it is this "distinguishing character" (55) that is stolen: one's name, address, Social Security number, employment history, credit history, and more. It therefore is no wonder that victims of identity theft often feel a deep sense of violation as they struggle to reclaim their good names. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

#### **5. Begin with a Short Narrative**

##### Example

Joe Stevens was finally ready to purchase a home. He spent years putting money into a savings account, paid off his credit cards, and diligently paid every bill on time. Confident of his good credit rating, Joe visited the bank to inquire about a mortgage, but he discovered startling information: Joe defaulted on a home loan, had \$40,000 in credit card debt, and had a car repossessed for lack of payment. Joe Stevens, like many Americans, is a victim of identity theft. Instead of preparing to move into a new home, Joe began the long journey to restore his good name and to reclaim his identity. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

#### **6. Begin with a Question**

##### Example

How would you feel if you knew, at this moment, that some criminal is writing your name, address, and Social Security number on credit card applications and plans to charge thousands of dollars worth of merchandise on those credit cards? More importantly, how do you know that this is not happening? Millions of people have become victims of identity theft, and they often find out only after thousands of dollars have been stolen using their names. Identity theft is a serious problem that claims millions of innocent victims, and the government must implement better regulations to help put an end to this crime.

## **Introductions to Avoid**

Some approaches to introductions almost always fail to be interesting or engaging. Below are a few approaches to introduction that should be avoided. They are just about guaranteed to give an essay a weak beginning.

### **1. Avoid Beginning with Overly Vague and General Statements or Broad Generalizations**

Example: Crimes are committed every day by different people, and there are many different kinds of crime. Some crimes are more serious than others. One serious crime today is identity theft. (Can you hear the readers already starting to snooze? The first two sentences to this introduction are far too vague and general to get anyone interested in what the writer is going to say in the paper.)

### **2. Avoid Beginning with Dictionary Definitions Obvious to Readers**

Example: According to *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, the word "steal" is defined as "to take the property of another wrongfully." Identity theft is one form of stealing. (The writer of these sentences seems to assume that the readers are idiots, which is not a good impression to give readers. Who would not already know this definition of "steal"?)

### **3. Avoiding Beginning with a Direct Statement of What You, as the Writer, are Doing**

Example: In this essay, identity theft will be explained. I will discuss why it is such a big problem and what the government should do about it. (Such an introduction might be appropriate for a writer in junior high school, but mature writers use much more effective rhetorical strategies to begin their essays.)

## Introductions: A Few Tips

- **Write the introduction after you have written the body of your essay.**  
Writers often sit down to an empty computer screen and struggle to write an introduction, and understandably so: they do not yet know what exactly it is that they are introducing. You should have a thesis statement and an outline of points in mind as you write an essay, but there is no reason to have to write the introduction before you begin writing the body paragraphs. It is often much easier to write an introduction when you can actually see what you are introducing.
- **Avoid long introductions.**  
Introductions generally are not long, certainly not longer than body paragraphs. Avoid going into depth developing ideas in the introduction. That's for the body paragraphs of an essay, not for the introduction. The primary purpose of an introduction is just to introduce your essay.
- **Experiment with more than one type of introduction for the same essay.**  
As the examples above illustrate, different introductions can give an essay quite a different tone. You might try writing a few different introductions, using the approaches above, and you could then choose the introduction that you think best fits your paper.
- **Avoid the approach to introductions sometimes taught to young students.** Some young students are taught to begin an introduction with a thesis statement, followed by separate sentences that indicate the topics for the body paragraphs of the essay. Avoid this approach. It helps young writers organize an essay and stay focused, but it is rhetorically weak.