



Introductions

A good introduction grabs the reader's attention, provides enough background information for the reader to understand the topic of the paper, defines terms necessary for understanding the argument, makes clear the author's main driving question, problem and/or thesis, and offers a "roadmap" of the argumentative direction the paper will take.

The following introductions were taken, with permission, from actual Grinnell College student papers. Read them and analyze how well they achieve these goals.

The Sport of Villainy

In Shakespeare's *Othello* the main focus of the story is on the villain or, rather, two of the villains. Traditionally, the part of Iago is considered the epitome of classic villainy, perhaps the very best in all of Shakespeare's works. But what about Othello? Should his character be found innocent of all blame at the hands of evil Iago? Evidence argues that imperfections in Othello's character play the crucial role in Desdemona's death, not Iago's. While Iago portrays a man that is obviously manipulative and evil, Othello's evil is much more subtle. His semi-conscious acts of wrong make his character even more offensive than that of Iago in that they are rationalized and pardoned by the viewer in the name of love and trickery. By exploring the issues of nature and honesty, one can come to the conclusion of who the real villain is, Iago or Othello.

- Does this introduction grab your attention? Are you interested in reading the paper from the first line? If not, what do you think the author could have done better to pique your curiosity?
- What specific background information does the writer provide? Is it enough to understand the topic?
- What is the author's question, problem or thesis? Does it have an argumentative edge? Is it specific? Does it make you want to read more? Does it announce the shape the paper will take?
- What advice would you give to this author to revise the introduction?

The Women's Power

"O forlorn man, be still. Here you grieve no more; you need not feel your life consumed here; I have pondered it, and I shall help you go" (85-86). After nine years in captivity, Odysseus is finally freed by these words from the nymph Calypso. Despite Odysseus's character as a man of action, he is helpless to begin his journey home without approval from the nymph. His actions are governed by her whims. Calypso's role is as one who does not act in yet has the power to control the story. This is the role adopted by most of the women in *The Odyssey*. Though the action in the story is dominated by male

characters, most of these actions would not be allowed to occur without the assent of women. Just as the nymph Calypso has the power to free Odysseus, Penelope's will has a power over the suitors. It is Athena that motivates and encourages Odysseus and Telemachus in all their adventures. While they are distanced from most of the action that takes place, women play an integral role in *The Odyssey*.

- How does this introduction compare to the first?
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