

Writing Introductions

The purpose of an introduction tells your reader how you will answer question and sets the scene for your essay. A good introduction:

- ✦ shows that you are going to answer the question
- ✦ shows that you understand the issues and their implications
- ✦ indicates the structure of your answer and make clear the main areas that you are going to write about
- ✦ shows evidence that you have carried out some research by making a reference to one of your sources
- ✦ only includes totally relevant details
- ✦ is concise: 5% of the word count (e.g. 100 words of a 2000 word essay)

Read the following examples and decide which meet the criteria for a good introduction.

Essay title: *Examine the sociological evidence of stereotypes of social groups in the mass media. What are the causes of stereotyping in the mass media and to what extent do they influence social attitudes?*
 Word limit: 2000

Example 1

As we all know, Britain is a multicultural society. In the 1960s many thousands of immigrants came to the country, mostly setting up home in the major cities. The majority of these immigrants came from the West Indies, India and Pakistan and Hong Kong. Racism has always been a problem, with the various groups of immigrants seen as stereotypes, although over the years there has been increasing integration into British society, particularly by the children of immigrant families. This is reflected in the mass media. Twenty years ago black people were rarely seen on television and very few held jobs in the press. However, nowadays, more and more black people work as journalists and are thus able to look at events from a different perspective.

Example 2

Stereotypes are everywhere: the reserved British, the disorganised Italians, the shopping-obsessed Japanese. This essay will talk about these stereotypes and ask if they are true. It is going to look at the different types of stereotypes and their representation in the media. The following areas will be covered: television; radio; the press, and the cinema. I will particularly look at television and ask the question "Does television reinforce these stereotypes?"

Example 3

Stereotypes abound in today's society. People seem to have an innate compulsion to categorise others into various groups and then to apply rigid and limited descriptions to these groups. There are therefore, amongst others, stereotypical nationalities and races; stereotypical sexes and sexual orientations and stereotypical classes. And one place where these stereotypes often thrive is in the mass media, particularly in the tabloid press and popular television, such as in situation comedy. Some, for example Hick (1996), claim that this is a harmless phenomenon, whereas commentators such as Ealham (1998) point to the possible dangers of obsessive stereotyping in the media. This essay will examine what sociological evidence there is for the process of stereotyping in the mass media, and will then go on to analyse the reasons for its occurrence. The final part of the essay will ask how far society's attitudes are in fact shaped by this portrayal of the various kinds of stereotypes.

Feedback on the introductions:

Introduction 1

There's no real problem with the actual English, but the writer shows no indication whatsoever of answering the question. The word 'stereotype' has been picked up on, and narrowly interpreted as meaning racial stereotype. But even then there is no attempt to focus on the actual question, and most of what is said is irrelevant. If the essay continues in this unstructured, confused manner, it is likely to struggle to pass.

Introduction 2

This is far too short and not very well written (inconsistency of tenses: will/going to). No attempt to put the question into some sort of context, to get the reader interested in what's to come. At first, it looks as if stereotypes are being interpreted simply as national stereotypes and also the writer goes off on the wrong tack: the question does not ask for a simple description nor asks about the validity of these stereotypes. The last part of the introduction, however, does indicate that the last part of the question will be addressed. If the writer manages to focus more on the actual question, the essay might just scrape a pass.

Introduction 3

This is a very good introduction. It's about the right length; gives a little relevant background and context, indicating that the writer has thought about what a stereotype is in its broadest interpretation; makes some initial references to sources; and finally focuses precisely on the question, showing the reader that it has been fully understood and that it will be answered. Note that the wording of the final part of the introduction is very close to that of the question. If the essay follows in the same vein, it should get an excellent mark.

Exercise adapted from: <http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/>