



Introductions: Focus, Problem, Thesis.

What makes the introduction of a research paper different from other essays you may have written is that *you* have to identify the problem your thesis addresses. The question is not provided for you. So, how do you frame a good problem in your introduction?

1. **Focus** by setting the scene quickly. For instance, this student wastes no time in introducing the subject of her paper:

Despite the fact that some parents and children willingly engaged in child labor during the Progressive Era, Mother Jones, a labor activist, was strongly against it because she argued that it destroyed children physically and mentally and deprived them from education.

Avoid starting with vast generalizations about history or human nature:

Bad: *Child labor has been an important issue throughout U.S. history.*

2. **Problem:** Create a tension that needs resolved by considering interpretations of your topic that pull in opposite directions. You can create tension in one of three ways: noting a contradiction or omission in your secondary source, noting contradictions within your primary sources, or by noting contradictions between your primary sources and a conventional misunderstanding of your topic. For instance, this student does an excellent job using the latter strategy to jump into the thesis:

*It is true that suspicion toward human nature made Puritans wary of certain institutions, **but** my research suggests that the same suspicion also produced authoritarian positions...*

Other examples of “but” moves:

- a. Working the evidence (you’ve discovered a wrinkle in the primary sources): *Although contemporary witnesses emphasized _____, a close analysis of the documents reveals the underlying issue was _____.*
 - b. Conventional wisdom needs correction: *Many Americans believe _____. Nevertheless, the sources tell a different story, namely _____.*
 - c. “They say/I say” (engaging with a specific argument, such as one presented in lecture or in another source)
 - a. Piggybacking (“Yes..., and...”). Responding to an issue introduced by others and completing work they’ve left undone: *X is correct in arguing _____. A close reading of my sources further suggests _____.*
 - b. Leapfrogging (“Yes..., but...”). Aligning yourself with a prominent argument, but then pointing out a problem that only your work can solve: *Whereas X provides ample evidence that _____, my own research convinces me that _____.*
3. **Thesis:** If you make your **focus** specific and take the time to create genuine **tension** in your introduction, you have set the stage for your **thesis**. Your thesis will have to be bold and evaluative (since you’re showing another way of looking at the evidence). Your thesis will also have to be specific, since you’ve focused from the beginning on a particular issue/source. For additional information, refer to the “Crafting a Thesis Statement” handout that I provided earlier in the semester.