Introductions

Getting Started:
The introduction is often the first paragraph of your paper, the one that has your thesis. Some people just write a thesis first, because they usually revise their thesis after writing the paper, so they write the introduction last to fit the new thesis. Some find writing the introduction first helpful in framing their thinking. Try different methods before settling into a routine. In either case, you should have a thesis before you start writing, because everything in your paper should relate to the thesis. Just don’t feel like you have to stick to the first-draft thesis or introduction.

The Role of an Introduction:
Think of an introduction as a bridge to your paper, written to help the reader understand what your paper is about, even if the reader is your professor. Usually it’s best to provide background, outline your topic, and state your thesis.
You also want to make sure they’re interested enough to keep reading.

The First Sentence:
One strategy is to start with the question you answer in your thesis. This is effective because it makes the reader curious to know your answer. Another strategy is to start with a story that grabs the reader, ideally one that illustrates why your topic is interesting and important. Make it snappy because your introduction is just one paragraph, and you can’t tell a story. You can save the end of the story for later if you want to tease the reader. You can also pose a hypothetical or start with a relevant quote, but you should address them fully in the introduction, even if you expand on them later. Otherwise, the beginning feels too abrupt and disconnected.

Defining the topic:
After you’ve grabbed the reader’s attention, you want to include some background information and outline your topic. The level of detail depends on your topic. Think about it like you’re choosing a map: you don’t need a map of the whole country if you want find the best route to the movie theater. If you are going to discuss a text, the title, author and date are necessary parts of the introduction, and if it’s fiction you might summarize the plot in a sentence or two and possibly introduce (hence the name introduction) material, themes or motifs relevant to your thesis. If you’re writing a history essay, don’t start at the dawn of human history. Just tell us who did what, where, when and why we should care.

Thesis:
If you’re just starting college level writing, it’s easiest to make the thesis the last sentence of the introduction. The thesis is your argument about the topic, not your description of it. There are lots of Writing Center resources you can check out on making your thesis controversial, meaning complex enough to argue.

To test if it works, show someone the introduction (just the introduction):
If friends or fellows can describe what your essay will discuss, it works.

Some elements adapted from the University of North Carolina Writing Center’s introduction to introductions. Find their full guide and other resources to get you started, including examples, through the Pomona Writing Center website at www.writing.pomona.edu.