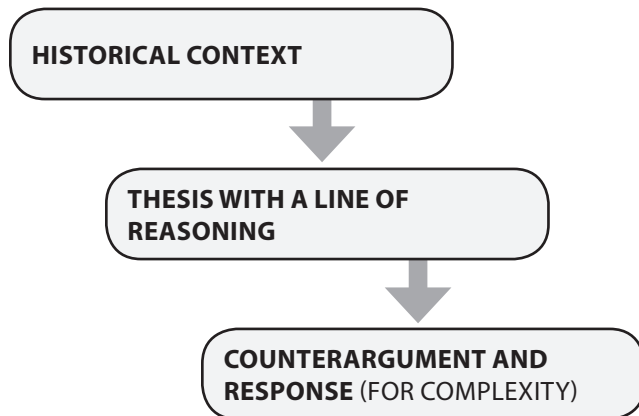


# CROSSCURRENTS

## WRITING INTRODUCTIONS

When you write your introduction to a historical argument, the following moves are beneficial.



### A Reference to Historical Circumstance

By contextualizing your argument, you build your own credibility, having examined the available examples and perspectives. The more you know about historical Circumstance, the more grounded and credible your argument becomes.

### A Clear Thesis with a Line of Reasoning

Here, you are demonstrating a debatable (or falsifiable) claim. Unlike a straw man argument, you recognize that there is legitimacy to both sides of the argument. Your line of reasoning presented can be explicit or implicit, and it will typically rely upon your understanding of the Common Topics. For example, you may create a thesis that establishes a **Relationship** and you focus on cause/effect; or, your thesis may invite a **Comparison** that focuses on whether continuity or change prevailed.

### A Reference to Complexity by Addressing a Counterargument

Similar to our exercise in the 4-sentence argument template (see the resource on the companion website), your capacity to credibly present opposing views requires one of three responses: concession, where you concede the point to the other side, similar to a stipulation in a court of law; rebuttal, a “yes...but” move where you broaden the context to focus on more impactful conditions, events, or perspectives; and refutation, where you discredit the opposing side by proving them false.

For practice, let’s use a prompt which appears at the end of Chapter 2 of *Crosscurrents*.

*Evaluate the extent to which the objectives of the Civil War changed from 1861 to 1865.*

Below you will find two sample responses to this prompt. Both samples are of introductions only. The first is an effective example of the criteria for successful introductions, while the second is a limited example that partially addresses the criteria. The annotations are provided to highlight the rhetorical moves made in each response.

For assistance, you may consult the sources on pages 42–50 of *Crosscurrents*.

**Sample Response: An Effective Introduction**

In the years leading up to the Civil War, much of the controversy regarding slavery was couched as a states' rights argument. The **Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854** reflected the conflicts surrounding “popular sovereignty,” and Abraham Lincoln himself argued that he would not impose any changes to chattel slavery during his **1861 Inaugural**. And while the **Second Great Awakening** invited greater respect for and awareness of individual agency—especially for women and blacks—this same focus on “self-reliance,” to paraphrase the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, was appropriated at the state level for the continuation of the status quo.

Such self-reliance, however, did *not* equate to owning people as property, so despite the promotion of individual agency, it was up to the federal government to ensure such agency. Therefore, the objectives changed from ensuring states rights to ensuring federal oversight, and as embodied by Lincoln, to move from disparate moral compasses to a fulfillment of the promise of equality—which was cited in the Declaration of Independence, and alluded to in the Gettysburg Address.

To those who remained loyal to the South, however, the “Lost Cause” and nostalgia for tradition meant anything but a unified moral compass. The terrors and failings of Reconstruction, such as the short-term success of the Freedman’s Bureau or the New Orleans massacre of 1866, testified to just how fragmented these objectives were. Indeed, just because the Civil War “ended” slavery did not mean the arrival of agency. Douglas Blackman’s *Slavery By Another Name* refers to the century following the Civil War as Neo-Slavery.

 **Rhetorical Annotations**

Reference to historical circumstance.

Note the focus on key aspects of legislation and ideological currents (boldfaced) as a way of providing context.

This thesis—that the federal government had moral oversight over the country—uses the common topic of Comparison to reveal change over time. The line of reasoning presents two changes: at the institutional and ideological level (underlined).

The opposing point of view reflects the limitations of the thesis above—both on a geographic level (North v. South), and on an ideological level (the North’s inability to ensure systemic reform for freed African Americans).

**Sample Response: A Limited Introduction**

In the years leading up to the Civil War, much of the controversy regarding slavery was couched as a states' rights argument. There was a much greater focus on individuality, and the **Second Great Awakening meant that people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Henry David Thoreau, and Abraham Lincoln** could help individual voices emerge.

Therefore, the objectives of the Civil War changed from a legal one to a moral one. People were more willing to recognize the power of the individual and the rights that they have, as was written “four score and seven years ago.” Lincoln’s **Emancipation Proclamation** was the beginning of the time when the federal government officially recognized the equality of all (men).

 **Rhetorical Annotations**

Unlike the prior example, this list of key figures has a “name dropping” quality that would benefit from a greater focus on Context, or how these **individuals** contributed to the larger **ideology**.

This is a debatable thesis, though one that would have greater clarity by use of proper nouns (outside of the Emancipation Proclamation), and a clearer use of Comparison: what actually changed over time?

**Sample Response: A *Limited* Introduction**

But others would disagree, especially since the Emancipation Proclamation was a wartime measure, and it freed only enslaved persons in the states that were in rebellion. Even though Lincoln was an idealist, his practical moves reflected the limitations of fighting a moral war.

 **Rhetorical Annotations**

Despite the attempt at the opposing side, the specificity of this counterclaim would likely serve a body paragraph more fully, rather than an introduction. Perhaps a greater focus on the political and social tensions would assist here.

**More Resources Available at**  
**[www.sherpalearning.com/crosscurrents](http://www.sherpalearning.com/crosscurrents)**