

Three ways not to start a Paper

- 1) "Since the beginning of time people have been wondering about the issue of X"; "X has been a difficult problem and philosophers, clowns and hedge-fund managers have been thinking about it ever since the big bang"; "Plato was an important Greek philosopher who discussed such crucial topic as X"; etc.

=> **Don't** attempt to frame the paper by introducing an artificial historical context. If the historical genealogy of the topic is not actually the point – that is, if it is not what the paper is about – just skip this throwaway opening altogether, and get to the point directly.

- 2) "According to the Oxford English Dictionary (or Webster's, American Heritage, or Wikipedia), X is the property of being x-ish, having an X for a sister, or liking to do X on Tuesdays. But the philosophical importance of X..."

=> **Don't** start with a dictionary definition. These do not suffice when you want to explain a term in a specialized academic field or context, and thus do nothing to advance the discussion or the reader's understanding of the topic.

- 3) "What is x?"

=> This is not a good way to start, since either you are setting yourself up for opening #1, or for #2, or you're asking a rhetorical question. If you want to start by explaining what x is, go ahead and state it in an affirmative statement. Rhetorical questions as a first sentence are an uninformative way to begin, and stylistically infelicitous.