Writing an introduction

A well-reasoned essay sits like an iceberg in the water, showing us a tip which indicates a deep mass of knowledge. If you have done the research - the reading and thinking that is the ice beneath the surface - it will be abundantly clear to your marker in your introduction.

Your introduction:

• demonstrates your understanding of the subject
• establishes/defines any necessary terms/events/concepts methods, etc
• has a clear and comprehensive statement of your argument in relation to the set topic
• prepares your reader for what follows, ie signposts how you establish your response and the arguments to be presented.

Consider the following first year Law assignment:

Is there a place for programs such as the Koori Court in the Australian legal system? Should there be courts for other groups in our society? (1500 words)

There are many ways to answer this question, and many ways to write your introduction. You may find it useful to think about your introduction as a series of moves:

Move 1: Introduce the field/discipline and topic
A brief context for the field of inquiry will orient the reader. Keep the background material to a minimum, and focus this material towards your argument, eg:

The Koori Court was an initiative established in Victoria to accommodate more culturally appropriate processes and outcomes for Indigenous people.

Move 2: Indicate previous research/what is currently understood
As you begin to map the debate and identify the key issues, a good place to start is some background on which there is general agreement, eg:

Aboriginal people are grossly over-represented in the prison system, and they are more likely to return to prison (Preston, 2001).

Move 3: Prepare for the present essay by indicating the problem/controversy
Your next move identifies the issue raised in the question. This issue will be at the heart of the essay question: how well you have focused on the key issue will indicate to the marker how well you have done your research and applied
your mind, eg:

However, some critics have suggested that, in creating a separate court for one group within Australian society, other groups may also agitate for special pleading, and the country’s universal justice system will be undermined (Hancock, 2005).

Move 4: Introduce your line of argument and outline the structure of your essay

This move is your thesis statement. It answers the question by setting up a line of argument. The marker can clearly identify how you perceive the key issues and how you will proceed, eg:

While creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous culture is unique to Australia; its custodians are not just another group within Australian society. There are also numerous precedents for special courts which refute the argument for special pleading. Furthermore, an analysis of the Court’s proceedings demonstrates how effective it is in providing more equitable justice to Indigenous people. Finally, although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide opportunities for implementation within the broader legal system.

In this answer, the student has clearly answered the two questions: there should be a Koori Court; there is no need for separate courts for other groups in Australia. The introduction signposts how the four key issues on which the essay will proceed: a discussion of Indigenous people’s unique place in Australian society; other courts in Australia which focus on particular groups or issues; how the Koori Court improves justice outcomes for Indigenous people; and how the lessons from the Koori court can improve justice for all.