

# Writing Effective Introductions

Great writers know that effective and impacting essays begin with an interesting and engaging introduction that reveals their thesis and purpose, while capturing the reader's attention.

## Introductions help writers...

- Reveal their essay's central idea or thesis
- Guide readers to important ideas in the body of the essay
- Provide relevant background information to help readers understand the essay's purpose and thesis.

## Purpose and the Introduction

An introductory paragraph is the start of your essay. The purpose of the introduction is to introduce the topic as well as to grab the reader's attention. It also will provide the structure for the rest of the essay.

## Grabbing the Reader's Attention - the "hook"

- The hook is the lead which consists of several sentences which are meant to grab the reader's attention. The hook can be created by starting the essay with an anecdote (story), a quotation, a fact, relevant background information, or a meaningful statistic.

### Anecdote

- An anecdote is just a fancy word for a story. An anecdote is not just any ordinary story; it is a story that is an amusing, dramatic, or an attention-getting incident. Since most people enjoy a good story, an anecdote is a great way to begin an essay. Just make sure the story is related to the topic of your essay. Not any story will do.

Example:

The young man with the hammer hoisted himself onto the top of the wall. All around him on the wall and on the ground, people chanted and cheered. The young man knelt down, with his hammer, and began to chip away at the cold, gray concrete. Little by little, the wall began to crumble. As I watched in amazement, it was hard to comprehend the fact that I was watching the Berlin Wall coming down. The removal of the Berlin Wall signified the fall of not just a wall, but an entire system of government. The fall of the Berlin Wall ended communism in Germany and created the growth of capitalism in Eastern Europe which allowed for globalization to spread through Europe and into Asia, creating the current global state of affairs.

## **Quotation**

- Another good hook is using a quotation as a way to stimulate the interest of the reader. Using a quotation as a hook suggests that you have researched and thought about your topic. Avoid using quotations that are very lengthy or too complex. Avoid opening with a quotation from a dictionary. If you need help finding a quotation try: [www.coolquotes.com](http://www.coolquotes.com).

Example:

H.L. Mencken defined 'Puritanism' as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." The clerks at the Department of Motor Vehicles must be puritans. They seem to do their best to see that each person who comes in to get a license or registration, has to wind through a confusing maze of lines, must wait an eternity for help, and has to remain standing the entire time. Therefore, it is imperative that the Department of Motor Vehicles should expand their budget, hire more clerks, open more windows, and offer more seats in the waiting room.

## **Fact**

- A shocking or startling fact is a good hook to use because it is often the best way to grab the reader's attention. A surprising or shocking fact makes your readers curious and they will want to continue reading your essay. When using this technique, it is sometimes a good idea to include the source of your information. Make sure the fact is related to your topic.

Example:

Fully half the fatal automobile accidents in Maryland involve a drunk driver, according to the State Division of Motor Vehicles. We should support concerned citizens who are now demanding that three strict laws be passed to alleviate this problem. The state should pass these laws which crack down on drunk driving by taking away the licenses of repeat offenders, allowing for more jail time in cases of a DUI arrest, and increasing drunk driving fines and penalties for first-time offenders.

### **Background Information**

- Providing background information in an essay introduction serves as a bridge to link the reader to the topic of an essay. Provide enough information so that the reader is able to understand the topic covered in the essay and appreciate the importance of the topic.

Example:

To hold its own in the struggle for existence, every species of animal must have a regular source of food, and if it happens to live on other animals, its survival may be very delicately balanced. The hunter cannot exist without the hunted; if the latter should perish from the earth, the former would too. When the hunted also prey on some of the hunters, the matter may become more complicated.

### **Statistics**

- A statistic works the same way as a shocking fact; it will add emphasis to the topic of your essay and will stimulate the interest of your readers. Once again, it's a good idea to include the source of your information.

Example:

Television is so popular that over 128 million sets are now being use in 98 percent of American households. According to the A.C. Nielsen Company, which takes television surveys, each week the small screen holds the attention of children under five for an average of 23.5 hours and adults for an average of 44 hours. Indeed, the typical viewer spends more time on any other activity except sleep. Yet, far from being the 'idiot box' that it is often called, television offers viewers many benefits. Television may be educational as well as entertaining.

## **Things NOT to do in an introductory paragraph:**

- Never apologize. Never suggest that you don't know what you're talking about, that you're not enough of an expert in this matter or that your opinion doesn't count. This causes the reader to lose interest in your paper.

### **Avoid phrases like:**

In my humble opinion . . .  
I'm not sure about his, but . . .  
I think that . . .  
I believe that . . .  
It is my opinion . . .

- Never announce your intentions. Do not flatly announce what you are about to do in your essay. Get into the topic and let your reader perceive the purpose in the topic sentence or thesis statement.

### **Avoid phrases like:**

In this paper I will . . .  
The purpose of this essay is to . . .  
I intend to discuss . . .  
This paper aims to talk about . . .  
I want to discuss . . .