

Writing Introductory Paragraphs

You have only one chance to make a first, and lasting, impression.

The Introductory Paragraph should prepare the reader for what is to follow and arouse the reader's interest in the topic.

Types of Introductory Paragraphs

1. Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is the main idea for the entire essay. Because a thesis statement is usually only one sentence, some further explanation is required in the introductory paragraph. Identifying the main subsections of the essay and noting the order in which they will appear is helpful to the reader.

2. Personal Comment or Anecdote

The personal comment can be an opinion or a statement about something that actually happened. An anecdote or brief story about something that has happened to you or to someone you know can provide an excellent hook to catch the reader's attention.

3. Questions

Ask questions that will interest the reader and, whenever possible, sequence them so that they suggest the order of the paragraphs in the body of the essay.

4. Opposite View

To arouse interest, begin with the exact opposite of the popular belief, or of your real opinion. Afterwards, state your true point of view. The shock value can be an effective attention-getter.

5. Quotation

An appropriate quote may offer an effective beginning. Choosing the right length is important. A short quote can be explained or elaborated, a medium length quote may be just right, but a long one is likely to be just that—too long.

6. Startling Statement

Rock 'em, sock 'em, and shock 'em! Grab the reader's attention with an outlandish statement. Surprise the reader with something out of the ordinary.

7. The Mix

You can weave an introductory paragraph from a blend of the techniques described above. With a little of this and little of that, the results should be creative, descriptive, interesting, and informative.

Introductory Paragraphs Exercise

Below each introductory paragraph, write the name of the technique that has been used.

1. Where does the light go when the light goes out? Who put the bomp in the bomp bah bomp bah bomp? Who put the ram in the rama lama ding dong? How do they get the caramel in the Cadbury chocolate bar? Do you have an inquiring mind but can't find answers? Research using the "People You Know" method, the "People Who Know The People You Know" method, and, of course, effective use of the Internet will provide positive results.

2. Successful salesman and Scottish entrepreneur, Tommy Dewar, once stated, "Fish stimulates the brain, but fishing stimulates the imagination." Imagination is the cornerstone of creativity. The craving for creativity can be satisfied only if you are willing to take risks, to picture life from varying points of view, and to think outside the bag.

3. It has been said that some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. But mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the greatest of them all? In the mystifying and mythical world of the Greeks, is it Heracles, Odysseus, or Achilles? Each has his claim to fame.

4. One person just can't do that much! Poverty surrounds us and there isn't that much that a teenager can do... or is there? I believe that by starting small, by setting an example, and by sharing your successes, you really can accomplish something.

5. The theme of justice runs throughout *The Merchant of Venice*. To appreciate what William Shakespeare's play, written over 400 years ago, has to say to us today, consideration should be given to the letter of the law, "legal" versus "just," and justice for all.

6. My life is in the toilet. I've been dealt such a rotten hand it's a miracle how I even survive. Thinking like this is counterproductive. The world of entertainment is filled with examples of people who battled adversity and won. Orphan James Michener, stutterer Mel Tillis, and one-eyed Sammy Davis Junior are three examples.

7. We called him Black Bart. He wore a black cowboy hat, a black T-shirt, black jeans and black trucker boots—and he carried a hunting knife on his belt. He used to throw the knife into the wall of the mess hall each night before supper. Every kid in camp was afraid of him, that is, until rock climbing school. We all learned three things at camp that year—fear is blinding, all is not as it appears, and revenge is bittersweet.
