The Introduction Paragraph

An essay begins with an introductory paragraph that tells the reader what to expect to read. A good introduction:

- starts with a **hook** that grabs the reader's attention;
- mentions the **topic** of the essay;
- gives **background information** to connect the reader to the topic;
- and includes a **thesis statement** that gives the main point of the essay and explains the writer's idea or position about the topic.

ACTIVITY 2 | Studying essay introductions

Read the introductory paragraphs in these essays. For each introduction, answer these questions: Does it make you want to read the whole essay? Why or why not?

1. Essay 1.1, "Against E-Voting"

   _____

   _____

2. Essay 1.2, "Camouflage for Survival"

   _____

   _____

3. [Your choice from another unit] Essay _____

   _____

   _____

The Hook

The **hook** is a device used to catch the reader's attention. It is often the opening sentence of an essay. There are a variety of ways to write an effective hook:

TYPE OF HOOK	EXAMPLE
Definition	The dictionary defines gossip as "casual conversation," but gossip is in reality a much more negative interaction.
Quote from a famous person	As entrepreneur Richard Branson said, "There is no planet B. We have to take care of the one we have."
Question	Have you ever thought about where your salad comes from?
Statement that shocks, surprises, or amuses	Each year thousands of teenagers die in driving accidents.
Dilemma/conflict	Some college graduates must decide between an interesting, low-paying job and a more mundane job that pays well.
Comparison (simile or metaphor)	Life is like a roller coaster.

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WRITER'S NOTE Writing an Effective Hook

Remember, good writers grab their readers' attention with a hook. Look at the two versions of a hook for an essay about a vacation experience.

> It might seem unlikely to catch the flu, lose a wallet, and get a speeding ticket in one afternoon, but these incidents ruined a vacation.

> It was a bad vacation.

The second hook, which uses the verb *be,* is simple and boring. In contrast, the first hook gets the readers' attention by providing details associated with the verbs *catch, lose, get,* and *ruin*. Using specific verbs forces you to provide interesting details that create a better hook.

ACTIVITY 4 | Writing hooks

Read the essay topic, title, and summary. Then write a hook and indicate which type it is. Use a different type of hook for each essay.

1. Topic: Booking a cheap air ticket
Title: Three Websites for Finding a Cheap Airfare
Summary: This essay explains the benefits of using three websites to purchase an inexpensive air ticket.

Hook: _____

_____

Type of hook: _____

2. Topic: Remembering all your different passwords
Title: The Problem of Creating and Remembering Passwords
Summary: This essay discusses the difficulty that we have remembering all our passwords.

Hook: _____

_____

Type of hook: _____

3. Topic: Choosing the members of a jury
Title: How Lawyers Select Jury Members
Summary: This essay considers strategies lawyers use for selecting the members of a jury.

Hook: _____

_____

Type of hook: _____

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A farm-to-table chef harvests kale in a vegetable garden.

4. Topic: The benefits of eating kale
Title: An Unexpected Vegetable Ally
Summary: This essay explains four beneficial effects of eating kale daily.

Hook: _____

_____

Type of hook: _____

Thesis Statement and Controlling Idea

An essential part of any essay is the **thesis statement** because it tells a reader what the essay is about and why it was written, its purpose. The thesis statement contains the **controlling idea** of the essay—a word, phrase, or clause that states the writer's opinion or position on the subject. Look at a thesis statement for an essay on the general topic of cell phones in schools:

specific topic — controlling idea
Student use of cell phones in schools should be prohibited.

In this example, the reader expects the essay to give the writer's opinion about why students should not use cell phones in schools.

A good thesis statement often includes the writer's reason or information to support the position. In the example below, the writer gives a reason for his position that societies should not rely only on electronic voting.

controlling idea — specific topic — reason
Societies should not rely solely on electronic systems for voting because elections are too important to trust to computers.

With the topic and controlling idea, a thesis statement provides a blueprint for the organization of the entire essay—it tells the reader what to expect in each body paragraph.

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