

Introductions

Introductions set the tone of the essay and invite the reader into the topic. There are five common approaches to writing an introduction.



THE FUNNEL APPROACH

A very common and useful type of introduction where the writer identifies the general subject area in the opening sentence, making some generalization aimed at arousing interest and, perhaps, establishing a bond of common awareness and knowledge with the reader is the funnel approach. The author narrows the subject down step by step, sentence by sentence, to the specific aspect of the general subject and the specific viewpoint towards it that forms the thesis. In other words, the funnel introduction begins with a very broad general idea and continues with ideas that are more and more specific, until it arrives at the thesis sentence – the most specific idea of the introduction is given the label “funnel.” Here is an example of the funnel introduction:

The life of a teenager in modern America is not always pleasant. He or she is faced with a multitude of conflicts and problems, many of which seem almost impossible to overcome. Most of these problems center around school, which is not surprising considering that the teenager devotes an average of eight hours a day in school and school-related activities. One of the primary problems created by schools and faced by teenagers is the intense pressure to achieve and maintain exceptional grades.

THE CONTRAST APPROACH

An appropriate introduction to use when the thesis contradicts or modifies a commonly held belief or assumption is the contrast approach. It begins with several sentences explaining the commonly held opinion and then presents the thesis as the opposite of this belief or assumption. Here is an example of the contrast introduction:

Most people assume that learning to ski is not extremely difficult. They imagine the process consists of little more than strapping on two long boards, pushing off at the top of a hill, and gliding gracefully and effortlessly to the bottom. However, learning to ski is more difficult than these people realize, and requires long hours of practice, extremely good physical condition, and a lot of determination.

THE ANECDOTE APPROACH

In the anecdote approach, the writer relates an incident or story which demonstrates or exemplifies the thesis. It is usually quite brief, points clearly and directly to the thesis and easily culminates in a statement of the thesis. The major of this approach is

in capturing the reader's interest both by its content and by its easy and informal style. This opening is more likely to be favored for articles written for popular consumption than for formal scholarly works. Here is an example of anecdotal introduction:

Thelma Gray and Lucy Taylor, both fifteen years old and known for their adventurous spirits, said good-bye to their mothers on a sunny morning in May 1976, and set out for their bus stop at the corner. They were invited to a picnic and swimming party at a suburban park a few miles away. Clutching their bathing suits and bright beach towels, they hurried toward a fun-filled day with their friends. Thelma and Lucy, however, never reached the park and never saw their friends again. By nightfall their bodies had been found beside a seldom-used road in an isolated area of the country near the park. Both had been bludgeoned to death. Police, reconstructing the young women's last day, determined that they were two more on a growing list of girls who had decided to hitchhike and who paid the ultimate price for their decision. Chief of Police Erwin T. Miller had tears in his eyes as he announced the cause of the teenagers' deaths and pleaded with other girls to heed police warnings against hitch-hiking. "People," he said "who accept rides with strangers run the risk of losing their lives in the same tragic manner as these two poor girls."

THE QUESTION APPROACH

Using a rhetorical question in the introduction can be provocative, trying to shock the reader or immediately draw him/her into the essay. In the following example, the writer uses more than one question in this introduction of a process essay:

Are you one of the many people who dream of becoming a recording artist? Are you stymied because you have the talent but not the first idea of how to get started in the recording business? If so, get out that music and practice those scales because you are going to learn how to record your own demo tape. Making a demonstration tape and sending it off to record companies could be the first steps in making your dream of vocal stardom come true. (excerpted from Anderson, Marilyn *Keys to Successful Writing*. New York: Longman, 1999, page 144.)

THE QUOTE APPROACH

Using a famous quote and explaining the quote as it refers to the essay is another way to hook the reader and lead him or her to the thesis statement.

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be." Most students have heard this old saying, either from parents or grandparents. But in this day and age, with credit cards accounting for a large part of our purchases, few people can say they never borrow. In fact, credit has become part of the American way. While a credit card can cause trouble in the hands of a spendthrift, when used wisely credit cards can help provide for a student's needs while also teaching him or her how to manage money.

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