



Formulating a Great Introduction

A Menlo College Fall 2013 Writing Center Module
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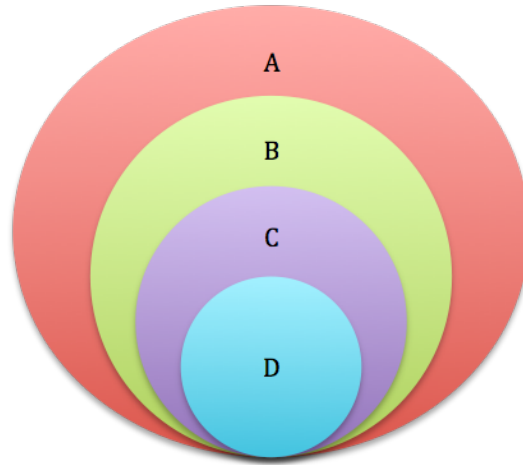


Your essay is like a stick of dynamite: the explosion is at the conclusion, the burning of the fuse is the body, and the spark that ignites the whole process is the introduction. Without a good introduction, you miss the chance to make a strong first impression and engage your readers. Introductions aren't easy. In fact, many writers prefer to write their introduction paragraph last- which you can do also! But whether you start or end your writing process with it, here are a few methods that can help you to write an interesting introduction and get you a higher grade on every essay you write:

1. Start with a broad, interesting first sentence (the “hook” or “attention grabber”). Avoid sentence fragments, the dictionary definition, the “since the dawn of man” introduction, and the boring book report hook (i.e. “In the book _____ by _____ written in 1984...”)
Instead try:

Method:	Example:
Tell a brief anecdote (a short, interesting story relating to your argument or the issues you are about to discuss).	As Elizabeth Eckford walked through the crowd in front of Little Rock Central High School, she had no idea that her brave actions would change the course of American history.
Start with a quotation relating to your argument or the issue you are about to discuss.	American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that “the unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”
Give a brief history about the topic.	On August 28 th , 1963, the single most influential civil rights activist in American History prophesized that one day all people - regardless of race, religion, or gender – would be able to live in perfect unity with one another.
Ask a rhetorical question (which will be answered or explored in your thesis).	What if everywhere you went, you were discriminated against?
Use imagery to engage your audience.	The shimmering blue waters of the Washington Memorial were laid out before the thousands of people gathered there.
Share an interesting statistic (key word- interesting!)	According to the Gallup Poll Organization, in 1962, 85% of whites thought that black children in their community had just as good a chance of getting a good education as white children.

2. Use the funnel method, getting more in-depth with each sentence before arriving at the thesis. For an essay relating to a specific novel, see the example below.



- A. Your opening sentence- not specific. Use one of the methods listed above to talk about a general idea, general thought, or general argument. Keep this very broad, and talk about how this idea or argument relates to all of humankind, even if you don't say it explicitly.
- B. Get more specific. Talk about how this idea or argument relates to literature as a whole, or to a specific population. Or give one of the main points of your argument.
- C. Get even more specific. Talk about this idea or argument as it relates to your author, genre, or to a specific sub-part of the previously talked-about population. Or give another one of the main points of your argument.
- D. Your thesis- the most specific. Talk about how the ideas you have discussed so far relate specifically to the text you are analyzing.

Example:

	"There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness."
	As German philosopher Freidrich Nietzsche recognized, love and madness often go hand in hand.
	This connection has been explored throughout many works of literature dating back thousands of years, but few genres delve as deep into the connection as fictional novels. Tim O'Brien investigates the origins of insanity and its correlation with love in his narrative <i>In the Lake of the Woods</i> .
	The story revolves around devastated politician John Wade, and his evident madness, which causes him to murder the wife he adores.

3. End your introduction paragraph with your thesis. Remember that this is the most important part of your essay: the argument. What are you trying to convince your audience of? It should also give readers a clue as to *how* you are going to convince them of your points. (For example: Their stories “To Build a Fire” and *Into the Wild* present a negative view of Christianity in the poor father and son relationships, allusions to God, and eventual martyrdom or crucifixion of their protagonists.) Try to keep your thesis in one strong sentence, if possible. For more help, see the Menlo College Writing Center module on thesis statements at: <http://www.menlo.edu/uploads/academics/Thesis.pdf>

Practice What You’ve Learned!

- Pick out and fill in the part of the 4-sentence funnel that is missing!
 - The world would be filled with nothing special if it were not for determined rebels. Authors like Zora Neal Hurston often focus on the tension between rebels and the world that asks them to conform. In her literary masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston writes about a woman named Janie, who conforms to the assumptions of the men in her life to varying degrees, depending upon the level of security she feels in the relationship.
 - What is missing?
 - A. A hook
 - B. Funneling sentences
 - C. A thesis
 - How would you fix it? (Create a sentence that would fit in!)

Put this introduction paragraph in order!

- A. Nowhere is this more evident than in the media, where throughout American history, the game of football has been depicted as the perfect allegory for the American Dream.
- B. There's the shrill cry of the whistle; the commanding nature of the quarterback's voice piercing through the silent air; the deep thud of the helmets' clash; the adrenaline rush of watching a perfect catch followed by the perfect touchdown; and the roar of the crowd after every play.
- C. Football holds a special place of honor in the heart of America, seated beside the Constitution and the American Flag- it has become much more than a simple game.

Answer Key: 1. A, Suggestion: News editor Doug Floyd once said that it was impossible to “get harmony when everybody sings the same note,” and he was correct. 2. B, C, A

For more please see:

- "A Proper Introduction." *Capital Community College Guide to Grammar and Writing*. Capital Community College Foundation, n.d. Web. 11 Sept. 2013. <<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/intros.htm>>.
- "Introductions." *The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 11 Sept. 2013. <<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/introductions/>>.
- Mohr, Carolyn. "The Power of a Great Introduction." *TED-Ed*. TED Conferences LLC, n.d. Web. 11 Sept. 2013. <<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-power-of-a-great-introduction-carolyn-mohr>>.
- "Writing an Introductory Paragraph." *The Dean B. Ellis Library at Arkansas State University*. Arkansas State University, 5 June 2012. Web. 11 Sept. 2013. <<http://libguides.astate.edu/content.php?pid=54191>>.