

ENG 1310
College Writing I
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Fall 2003

Introductions: or, "How to Begin an Essay."

There it is: the blank sheet of paper. The most difficult part of writing an essay is often just getting started. Here are some tips to make your paper's "introduction" smoother to read and easier to write.

It is very important to **get to the point** in your paper QUICKLY. In a critical essay, few readers want a "surprise" ending. Tell your reader what you are writing about, then support and explore that subject as best as you can & as soon as you can, preferably in the first paragraph. Your **thesis** tells the reader what you are going to prove, introducing your argument.

Step One: Write a working outline.

This is a beginning of your beginning. Sometimes the process of "brainstorming" that you are doing when you write your outline will feed right into a great idea for an introduction. Also, an outline is a good "map" to keep your ideas from getting lost. Put your ideas down in writing in a loose order, and later decide if this order is the best for the overall paper. A working outline is fluid—it can and will change at any time.

Step Two: Write your introduction.

Your intro should ease the reader into the paper, then clearly define the focus of that paper. Remember—the focus of the paper is the THESIS—and it should be included in your introductory paragraph. (That's easier said than done, how do I write an introduction?!)

WHAT IS AN INTRODUCTION? HOW DO I DO IT?!

Your paper has a beginning, a middle and an end.

The beginning is your intro: it includes your thesis and gets your argument off to a good start.

Good Beginnings:

Tell a story, describe (briefly) a scene. (Don't get carried away, remember, the story/scene should be BRIEF.)

example: Once, when I was five, I wandered away from my mother in the grocery store. By the time she realized I was missing, I had become frightened, met up with a scary looking person, and sat down in the middle of the cereal aisle, crying. I had become aware that I could be lost. Kate Chopin, in her novel, *The Awakening*, analyzes "getting lost."

Use a quotation from the novel, or from another source, (a well known person or literary work) which seems to say the same thing as your novel but in a nice, short sentence— a quick knockout punch as a beginning.

example: André Breton, a French Surrealist, once said, "To see, to hear, means nothing. To recognize (or not to recognize) means everything. Between what I do recognize and what I do not recognize there stands myself." Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier begins to recognize, and a great novel is born out of her "awakening."

Begin with a simple, definite statement. You are building an argument. Start right away by defining the terms of your argument!

example: To be “awake” is to be aware of the world, to know the self, to question the everyday. We have all had the experience of suddenly realizing some fact that we had not been previously aware of: our eyes have been opened. In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, . . .

Ask a question:

example: Kate Chopin’s novel, *The Awakening*, was reportedly banned from the library in her own home town. Experts disagree as to whether this ever really happened, but why would the people of her town want to ban her novel? What is in her story that is *so* shocking?”

Bad Beginnings:

- ✧The dictionary definition : (Webster’s defines community as:) **Boring!**
- ✧Broad, sweeping historical background (Since time began humankind has tried to . . .)
- ✧Justification of topic (Why should we study the Greenhouse Effect?)
- ✧The blueprint: (In this essay I will discuss . . .) Note: you do want to *have* a blueprint of what you plan to discuss, you just do not need to define for the reader what it is, in these broad terms. In formal criticism, you want to be more subtle. *Show, don’t tell.*
- ✧The man from Mars (If a man from Mars were to study our culture, he would have questions such as: . . .)

Evaluation:

- ✓My argument is well organized.
- ✓All my facts and quotes effectively support my focus, (thesis).
- ✓Readers will appreciate my treatment of this subject.
- ✓My focus has been clearly defined.
- ✓Because I am passionate and interested in my subject, and because I “hook” them with an interesting introduction, readers will be convinced to share (or at least respect) my opinion.

Remember: As with job interviews and life in general, first impressions are everything. Your introductory paragraph is your reader’s first impression. If your introduction is smooth, precise and exciting, your reader will expect and find a great paper.

Don’t Forget Your PIE! (Point, Information, Explanation)