

It is important to write an introductory paragraph which convinces the reader that the essay will be worth reading. To be completed effectively, this opening paragraph must accomplish two things: **it must state the topic of the essay and it must capture the reader's interest.** Any one of several devices may be used to fulfill the latter purpose:

1. Emphasize the importance of the topic.
2. Ask a provocative question.
3. Use an appropriate quotation.
4. State the divisions of the topic.
5. Use a stimulating incident or an anecdote.
6. Develop a contrast which emphasizes the thesis.
7. Use material which disarms possible critics.
8. Define terminology.
9. Establish the author's credibility.
10. Proceed from a general situation to a specific instance -- the funnel.
11. Use a provocative statement to challenge a familiar belief.
12. Use a provocative statement to startle the reader.

1. EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC:

The writer may impress the readers by explaining the current interest in the topic.

For example:

Brook Farm, an experiment in group living which attracted such literary figures of the nineteenth century as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Charles A. Dana, had much in common with Charles Manson's family.

The writer may indicate that the subject may influence readers' lives.

For example:

According to the United Nations, over 240 million people, forty percent of them children, are starving in the world today. In addition, this planet has already begun to experience shortages

of gas, oil, and other important natural resources. These crises are even more frightening when one considers that the Earth's population is expected to double by the year 2000. Thus, it is clear that we desperately need to make plans to prevent fast-approaching global chaos and tragedy.

The writer may provide historical background to show the importance of the topic.

For example:

The Romans called it cerevisia - gift of cares, goddess of grain. Ancient Babylonians, Chinese and Egyptians all concocted it; the god Csisir, in fact, is credited with being the world's first brew master. Hammurabi made laws about it. He invented the running tab, allowing his subjects to settle up at the local dram shop after they had harvested their corn. George Washington brewed it at Mount Vernon, Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. During World War II, Wilson Churchill outfitted a floating brewery so that thirsty tommies fighting in the Far East could get their deli rations. Ethel Kennedy sips it with a shot of brandy or schnapps, while in Pittsburgh, steel workers use it as a "Wash" for whisky. Last year, Americans consumed an estimated 160 million barrels of beer - 90 quarts for every man, woman, and child in the U.S. Behind all those suds is a \$6 billion-a-year industry, and it is an industry in turmoil.

2. ASK A PROVOCATIVE QUESTION:

The reader's interest can be stimulated by asking the question that does not have an easy answer. The essay that follows should then be concerned with finding a possible answer.

For example:

Fortunately, at the present time, only certain nations of the world are suffering greatly from the effects of overpopulation, pollution, and shortages of food and other natural resources. However, as the Earth's population continues to increase at an alarming rate, all nations will eventually be gravely affected. As a result, how much longer can the nations of this planet afford the luxury of looking upon each other as separate when it comes to issues such as food supply or ecology? How long can we continue without global planning in areas crucial for human survival?

Have you ever seen those commercials with ladies in elegant gowns putting down a new floor in the red room? Have you ever felt you'd like to do the same? Don't. It's a long, complicated process.

What would happen if through a time machine we could get Muhammad Ali in the same ring as Jack Dempsey? Who would win? Would it be the quickest hands and feet of all time or

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the strongest punch?

3. USE AN EFFECTIVE QUOTATION:

A quotation is an easy and effective device to use -- if it is used sparingly. The daily newspapers are a good source of quotations suitable for current topics. If the subject is of a more general nature, the book Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, which you can find in the reference section of the library, may provide appropriate material.

For example:

“Our planet is in the midst of a terrible people explosion.” These words by Jean Libman Block, author of the essay “The Population Bomb and How to Defuse It,” remind us that unless the present growth rate for the Earth’s population is reduced, the world’s population will double by the year 2000. As we look ahead into the planets future, we can see not only a terrifying people explosion, but also uncontrolled nuclear capability, depleted natural resources, and similar life-threatening problems. Unless there is global planning for the future of this planet, there is little hope of avoiding doom for us all.

“Heroin is a death trip. I really enjoyed it. But once you get the habit, you’re in trouble. One good friend is in the hospital with an \$80 a day habit. Another is almost dead from hepatitis. Two others I know, one a girl, died from overdose. Every time you stick that needle in your arm you’re playing with your life.” this statement was made by a nineteen-year-old who, like many of his friends, had tried drugs out of curiosity and soon discovered that he was experimenting with danger.

4. STATE THE DIVISIONS OF THE TOPIC:

A brief idea of the plan of the essay, if stated in an effective manner, can hint at the interesting points which a writer intends to cover. This method should be reserved for lengthy, complex arguments.

For example:

The people of this planet need to plan ahead. Due to the rapid growth of the population and the rapid decrease in available natural resources to support life on Earth, all people are in danger. Surely such important problems as the food supply, health care, and environmental protection can be handled across national boundaries for the good of all people of the Earth.

5. USE A STIMULATING INCIDENT OR ANECDOTE:

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The use of an interesting incident or anecdote can act as a teaser to lure the reader into the remainder of the essay. Be sure that the device is appropriate for the subject and focus of what is to follow.

For example:

A young man named Darryl Stingley is laying in an Oakland, Calif., hospital bed, paralyzed from the neck down. At 26, Stingley was a pass receiver making a good living in football until a few weeks ago. Then, during an exhibition game between the New England Patriots and the Oakland Raiders, Stingley ran a slant pattern into the middle of the Raider secondary. As the pass arrived, so did safety Jack Tatum. Stingley lowered his head to meet the blow. Tatum delivered a clean and stinging hit, the kind that coaches usually like to see on the game films. It broke Darryl Stingley's neck. In honor of Stingley and other victims, therefore, the NFL should take action this season.

When I was a kid in Philadelphia, I must have read every comic book ever published (there were fewer of them then than there are now). I zipped through all of them in a couple of days, and then reread the good ones until the next issues arrived. Yes, indeed, when I was a kid, the reading game was a snap. But as I got older, my eyeballs must have slowed down or something. I mean, comic books started to pile up faster than my brother Russell and I could read them! It wasn't until much later, when I was getting my doctorate, that I realized it wasn't my eyeballs that were to blame. Thank goodness, they are still moving as well as ever. The problem is there's too much to read these days, and too little time to read every word of it. Now mind you, I still read comic books, in addition to contracts, novels, newspapers, screenplays, tax returns, and correspondence. I even read textbooks about how people read and which techniques help people read more in less time. I'll let you in on a little secret: there are hundreds of techniques you can learn to help you read faster, but I know of three that are especially good.

6. DEVELOP A CONTRAST WHICH EMPHASIZES THE THESIS:

The underlying idea of the essay may be heightened by contrasting it with circumstances of other times or situations.

For example:

Until a few years ago, humans could feel fairly smug about what was thought to be their unique ability to communicate with one another by using spoken language or symbols. Then psychologists at the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center in Atlanta taught two chimps named Austin and Sherman to "converse" by pushing buttons that displayed various symbols. For probably the first time, two animals were communicating by means other than their usual

repertoire of gestures, grunts, and squeals.

Doctors have long accepted the fact that emotions can cause such illnesses as asthma, hypertension, ulcers, and colitis. But new research indicates that cancer may be another disease which has some emotional basis.

One hundred years ago Americans sought inner peace through the Bible, philosophy, or rugged individualism. Today we have the added options of psychotherapy, computerized astrology, macrobiotic diets, imported Eastern mysticism, encounter groups, scientology, Dale Carnegie courses, and scores of freaky psychologies. But with all these promises of instant nourishment, modern Americans are spiritually underfed.

If a doctor gives 100 patients who complain of a pain a simple sugar pill, he can be sure that 33 will feel better. This is the classic “placebo effect,” and it is usually attributed to psychological factors rather than phony medication. This week, however, three California pain researchers presented surprising evidence that inert placebo pills actually have physical effect after all.

7. USE MATERIAL WHICH DISARMS POSSIBLE CRITICS:

By anticipating damaging objections, the writer may disarm would-be critics.

For example:

Football has often been called a game for men who are all muscle and have no brains. This charge may have been justified in the infant years of the game when it consisted entirely of running plays and when the players used brute strength to crash through the opposite line. Today, a team may use as many as fifty different plays, involving complicated deception and a wide

8. DEFINE TERMINOLOGY:

An initial definition may clarify a key term.

For example:

Economists do not agree amongst themselves on what “automation” means. Some writers use the term for any type of large-scale mechanization of industrial or administrative processes. Others, more plausibly, use it in referring to the mechanization of planning, supervision and control.

Dismiss “fashion,” which is ephemeral and external. Dispose of “mode” or “flair,” both inadequate. Discard “stylish,” the word itself a turn-of-the-century evocation of ladies with very small waists, very large hats, and very narrow minds. These have nothing to do with styles, which I see as a way of speaking, walking, behaving, creating and being, which is both highly personal and yet - through its commanding presence - able to color the social and cultural climate of others.

9. ESTABLISH THE AUTHOR’S CREDIBILITY:

Biographical or personal comments may help establish the writer’s qualifications for dealing with his or her subject.

For example:

I am a fan of science. My education is scientific and I have, in one field, contributed a monograph to a scientific journal. Science, to my mind, is applied honesty, the one reliable means we have to find out truth. That is why, when error is committed in the name of science, I feel the way a man would if his favorite uncle had taken to drink.

10. PROCEED FROM A GENERAL SITUATION TO A SPECIFIC INSTANCE:

The funnel-shaped opener begins with an assertion covering a broader area than the topic will; this gives the reader a wide perspective and a context for understanding the actual topic when it is stated. Then, in perhaps two or three subsequent sentences, the funnel paragraph narrows to the topic, which is usually revealed just as the paragraph ends.

For example:

Only a few politicians have taken a craftsman’s pride in self-expression, and even fewer including Caesar, Lord Clarendon, Winston Churchill, and DeGaulle have been equally successful in politics and authorship. Of these, Churchill may be the most interesting, for he was not only among the most voluminous of writers, but also commented freely on the art of writing. He was in fact a writer before becoming a politician.

The words *job hunting* seem to imply that there are jobs out there and all you have to do is find them, which is often the case. But many of the most interesting jobs are created when someone sees a need for a service and convinces a prospective employer that she is the very person to meet that need. Creating your own job may require starting your own business, but not always. You may be able to get what you want within an organization that already exists. The important thing is to know what it is you want to do.

11. USE A PROVOCATIVE STATEMENT TO CHALLENGE A FAMILIAR BELIEF:

For example:

Freedom in society is impossible. When the desires of two people do not agree, both cannot be satisfied. Who is going to be free to realize his desire - the man who wants to walk down the street shouting and singing, or his neighbor who seeks peace and quiet? The man who wants to build a new highway or the man who wants to retain the unspoiled natural beauty of the land. . .

Why waste four years going to college? In four years an ambitious high school graduate can become happily established with a company and have a sizeable lead on the road to fame and fortune over his former schoolmates. This is how I felt when I left high school. Three years of pursuing fame and fortune altered my thinking radically.

It's long been the American formula for success. It's been written, in various ways, on thousands of high school backgrounds. It's been sung, loud and long, by millions of parents: "go to college," the refrain begins, "and get that degree." After you graduate, good jobs will await you. The world will be yours." Recently however, many young people have discovered that a college degree isn't the key to success that it once was.

12. USE A PROVOCATIVE STATEMENT TO STARTLE THE READER:

A sentence surprises the reader with frank or unusual information can often attract attention for the soon-to-follow presentation of a thesis.

For example:

This year's film festival at Cannes was overrated, under planned, and completely schizoid...
I'm a Brazil nut. . .

I probably hold the world's record for the number of times anyone has ever taken beginning swimming. . .

Ann Lee was literally the Messiah who had come to earth in the form of a woman. At least that's what her followers believed. . .

CHECKLIST FOR THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

- 1. Does the introductory paragraph include the thesis statement?**
- 2. Does the introductory paragraph interest and attract the reader?**
- 3. Does the introductory paragraph establish the tone of the essay?**
- 4. Does the introductory paragraph use the most effective method of development?**
- 5. Does the introductory paragraph avoid these common errors?**
 - a. Using the apology.**
 - b. Echoing the title.**
 - c. Using the dictionary definition.**
 - d. Using important sounding declarations of a common place idea.**
 - e. Using clichés and overworked quotations.**
 - f. Using obvious expressions**

“In this paper, I shall . . .” or “The purpose of this paper is to . . .”
 - g. Using meaningless questions.**
 - h. Using overly long or overly short introductions.**
 - i. Using colorless, summarizing statements.**
 - j. Using unnecessary or irrelevant background material.**
 - k. Using absolute diction.**

**By the end of this paragraph we know that the topic will be Churchill’s writing,
but we arrive at the knowledge by sliding down the funnel
those politicians who took pride in self-expression
those who were equally successful
in politics and authorship
the most interesting
of these: Churchill
Churchill was
a writer.**