

Essay Introductions

When it comes to introductions, they should be designed to attract the reader's immediate attention and give him or her an idea of the essay's topic, scope, tone, and direction.

The first sentence of the introduction is often referred to as the “hook,” meaning it should be designed to aggressively grab the reader’s initial interest. To put this into perspective, think about how you wouldn’t want to continue reading a book that failed to grab your attention somewhere within the first chapter. This is why it is important to create an intriguing introduction for each essay that you write.

The hook that you use is really up to you and would depend on the topic that you are writing about. Coming up with an effective hook gives writers a chance to be a bit creative in their academic writing. There are several common types of hooks that can help you get your paper off to a good start.

The following introductions have been constructed to address a profile of an imaginary friend, Mark Towner, a graduate of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Clown College.

The Striking Statement: Designed to rouse the reader by startling him/her with an arresting statement -- usually a controversial one.

Example: One day, when Mark Towner was about 12 years old, his mother found him in the bathroom trying on her makeup. “I didn’t know what to think,” she says with a knowing smile. “I’d heard stories about young men putting on women’s clothes and singing in night clubs and naturally, I was concerned. However, when I saw what Mark was actually doing with my eyeliner and lipstick, drawing stars around his eyes and painting his lips twice their size, I realized that I’d stumbled upon a totally different obsession.” As it turns out, Mark did not grow up to be a female impersonator, instead, he grew up to be a professional clown.

Anecdote: A brief humorous story, usually with a point. This lead is especially adapted to profiles and personality sketches.

Example: Mrs. Towner, a sweet, conservative lady in her mid sixties, is extremely proud of her five children. Her eldest son is a sales executive for General Electric. Her second oldest is a systems analyst for Atlantic Richfield. Her third son is executive vice-president of the tax department at Union Oil. Her daughter, Linda, is an executive secretary at Hughes Aircraft. However, when she speaks of her youngest son, Mark, her eyes brighten with special pride and admiration. Mrs. Towner's youngest son is also a professional, but the tools of his trade are not a brief case or a computer. Instead, Mark carries a makeup bag and wig box. When Mark dresses for work, he doesn't put on the customary blue business suit and winged tip shoes, he instead wears eyeliner, yak hair, and sequins. Mrs. Towner's youngest son, you see, is a clown for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Quotation- Often, appropriate quotations are useful starters. Usually short quotes work best to lead into your writing and get you going.

Example: "The clown is a divine spirit invented to rejoice and delight the heart." This inscription, found in the pyramid of an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, is the earliest known reference to the art of clowning. Clowns, with their ready wit and colorful dress, have been delighting audiences for thousands of years. In order to learn a little about these age-old emissaries of laughter, I spoke with Mark Towner, a bright and funny young man who has dedicated his life to the art of being a clown.

Description-The old saying, “I’ll draw you a picture,” is a perfect way to describe this type of introduction. A brief but vivid description of the person or place you are profiling can lead your reader off to a great start. A lead of this type should be filled with specific images as well as facts.

Example 1 (place): The lights are dim in the large sports auditorium and the seats are filled with the colorful, moving, talking shadows of people. Muted strains of organ music mingle with sounds of laughter and the aroma of popcorn and hot dogs lingers deliciously in the air. There is no tent; there is no sawdust on the ground, but the auditorium is alive with the sights, sounds, and smells of a circus.

Example 2 (person): The tall, pink-haired clown in the electric blue satin bloomers, holding a small rodent-like mongrel in his arms, does not look happy. Instead, his lips are painted in an exaggerated crimson frown and a sequined teardrop stains his smooth, white cheek. Standing alone in the glow of a thin, white spotlight, he beckons to a child in the audience, imploring her with his eyes to pet the little dog in his arms. The child shyly reaches out and scratches the dog’s head. The clown smiles shyly and offers the child an enormous crepe paper daisy, which she accepts delightedly. In spite of the magic of the moment, this is just a regular working day for Mark Towner, the young man in the electric bloomers, pink wig, and white makeup. Mark is a professional clown with Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. Recently, I spoke with him about his rather extraordinary profession.

If your hook is only a sentence or two, follow it with a sentence or two of elaboration that will lead the reader from your opening to your thesis statement.

Remember to finish the introductory paragraph with your thesis statement.

“Introduction Don’ts”

1. Don’t start your essay by quoting a dictionary definition.
2. Don’t start your essay with a question, even a rhetorical one.
3. Don’t write a short or repetitious introduction.
4. Don’t review all of your essay’s main points in the introduction.
5. Don’t make an announcement. For example, “In this essay I will discuss” or something of that nature.
6. Keep your introduction brief. Do not write an introduction that goes on to the second page of your essay.

Some final thoughts:

Considering how important it is to make a good first impression with your essay, writing a good introduction can be very stressful. If you get stuck, try waiting until you finish writing the body of the paper before writing the introduction. This technique has saved me from countless hours of writer’s block as a student. There is no rule that says that your essay must be written in a certain order.

*Exercise:

Now, experiment with these methods addressing a topic of your choice. Write a separate introduction, each using one of the four hooks listed above.

Bibliography

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