

# HOW TO WRITE AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

## Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will practice writing an introductory paragraph. This is your chance to hook your reader. An introduction can **make or break** an essay or paper. You may write it first, but you should **rewrite** it again when you have finished your paper. Let's start by thinking about first impressions.

## Warm-Up

### A. Writing

Get a blank piece of paper and freewrite for five minutes about good and bad "first impressions". A first impression is the feeling you get the first time you meet or come across a person or thing. When you're finished writing, discuss questions 1–3 with your classmates.

1. What example of a good first impression did you write about?
2. Share an example of a bad first impression.
3. How can a business or product make a good first impression on you?

### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- |       |                        |  |
|-------|------------------------|--|
| _____ | 1. first impression    | a) to speed-read in order to understand the main subject matter  |
| _____ | 2. rhetorical question | b) a sentence or two explaining how the writing will be presented  |
| _____ | 3. hook                | c) the main argument or purpose of a piece of writing  |
| _____ | 4. myth                | d) information or content that grabs a person's attention  |
| _____ | 5. anecdote            | e) a short, interesting, related story   |
| _____ | 6. thesis statement    | f) a question that is posed so that people can think deeply about something (not looking for a response) |
| _____ | 7. relevant            | g) important or necessary  |
| _____ | 8. mapping statement   | h) a long-held belief that is not actually true  |
| _____ | 9. skim                | i) to provide feedback about a piece of work   |
| _____ | 10. critique           | j) the very first opinion a person makes after encountering something or someone new                     |

## Types of Introductory Statements

*Note: To complete the Tasks in this lesson, you'll need to be able to do a little research using the Internet or the library.*

The first thing to do when writing an introductory paragraph is get your reader interested in your general topic. A good introductory statement includes a hook or an attention-grabber. Here are four types of attention-grabbers.

### Did you know...

Sometimes when people ask questions, they aren't really looking for a specific answer. Instead, they are trying to make a point. This is called a *rhetorical question*. Many writers start introductory paragraphs with rhetorical questions. For example: *Is there anything more refreshing than ice cream?*

The word "rhetorical" rhymes with "historical".

### A. A Question

An introduction can start with a rhetorical question or a puzzling question. It can also start with a question that you plan on answering in detail.

#### Task 1

Imagine you are going to write an essay on Junk Food. Think of three possible questions for an introduction:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### B. A Quote

Literary or historic essays often start with quotes from authors or world leaders. Make sure to double-check the quote for accuracy. (Check a few different sources.)

#### Task 2

Find an interesting quote to use at the beginning of an essay about one (or all) of the following topics:

1. Parenting  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Equality  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. The Animal Kingdom  
\_\_\_\_\_



## A Reader's Guide

### WHY, WHAT, HOW?

Think of your introduction as a mini-guide for your reader. After you hook your reader, provide a little summary of what is to come. It may take 3–4 sentences to complete your introduction after your introductory statement. Use the question words “why”, “what”, and “how” as prompts when writing your introduction.

#### A. Why?

##### A TRANSITION TO YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

After you hook your reader with a statement, question, or example, write a sentence or two to lead up to your thesis. You may include a sentence about your topic and a sentence about why it's relevant. Imagine that your reader has this question in mind:

***“Why is this topic relevant to me?”***

#### B. What?

##### YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Many students get nervous when they hear the word “thesis”. Don't let this word scare you! The word thesis is just a fancy word for “main argument”. Every essay or paper needs a main argument that you will prove or explain. Here is your reader's question:

***“What exactly are you going to tell me or prove?”***

#### C. How?

##### YOUR MAPPING STATEMENT(S)

Finally, you need to tell your reader how you plan on presenting your ideas. In a five-paragraph essay with an introductory paragraph and a conclusion, you may have three main arguments that support your thesis. You can state these in your introduction. Your reader now has a good sense of what the paper will be about. Let's hope they want to keep reading!

***“How are you going to present your ideas or information to me?”***

## **A Reader's Guide cont.**

### **Task 5**

#### **CRITIQUE (ROLE-PLAY)**

Put down your pens and grab a partner! Take out a piece of paper and pretend it is a fully written essay on a topic below (or make up your own topic). Take turns pretending to be the "reader" and "writer". The reader has just finished the introduction. Instead of reading the rest of the piece, the "reader" uses the question prompts on page 4 to question the writer. The "writer" tries to imagine the introduction and answer the questions. The reader can also critique the invisible writing using both positive and negative feedback. Have fun!

#### **Topics:**

- Global warming
- School uniforms
- Internet addiction
- Food waste

#### **Negative Feedback:**

- Your thesis is weak.
- You need to rewrite this line.
- There are too many spelling mistakes.
- You need to rework this.

#### **Positive Feedback:**

- You hooked me right away.
- This is a great thesis.
- Great organization.
- This is going to be interesting!

## A Sample Introductory Paragraph

**Essay Title:** Springtime in the Big Apple

*The great American artist Georgia O'Keefe painted the perfect picture of New York City when she said, "One can't paint New York as it is, but rather as its felt." Everyone should get the chance to experience New York City at least once in a lifetime. New York City has a different feel in every season. The best time to visit the Big Apple is springtime. Spring is an affordable, comfortable, and fun time to experience everything the city has to offer. In comparison to winter and summer, spring is ideal.*

Find the thesis statement and rewrite it in the space below:

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## My Introductory Paragraph

### Task 6

Write your own introductory paragraph. Make sure to include a hook as well as a thesis and a mapping statement. Don't forget to answer "what," "why," and "how"!

Use a topic from an outline you wrote in a previous lesson, or write about a city you know a lot about.

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## Skimming for a First Impression

What's the first thing readers do when they pick up a piece of writing? They skim the page. They'll try to determine the length of the writing, the format of the writing, and the main topic. This is why it's important to use proper formatting in your introduction. Your title should be separate from your introduction. Your introduction should be spaced out nicely. It shouldn't be too short or too long. There should be no spelling mistakes in your introduction. If your first paragraph has spelling mistakes, your reader may stop before she reaches the body of your essay.

### Task 7

Double-check that the introduction you wrote in **Task 6** will leave a good first impression on your reader. Then share your introduction with a classmate (or your teacher). Give your reader **one minute** to skim the paragraph. Ask them to share their first impression with you.

## Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What is a rhetorical question? Provide an example.
2. What should the first sentence in an introductory paragraph do?
3. What is the main goal of the introduction?
4. What three questions should an introductory paragraph answer for the reader?
5. How long should an introduction for a standard five-paragraph essay be?
6. Why should a writer not be scared of writing a thesis statement?
7. What types of things can ruin a reader's first impression of a piece of writing?

## A Checklist

### BEFORE STARTING YOUR BODY

- Did I use an introductory statement that will hook my readers?
- If I used a quote, did I format my quote properly? Is it written exactly as the author or speaker used it, and did I credit this person?
- Did I include proper punctuation after my introductory statement?
- Did I provide a sentence or two leading up to my thesis or summarizing statement?
- Did I state my main argument (thesis) clearly?
- Did I provide a mapping statement to help my reader prepare for what will come next?
- Did I provide a general idea of what my main points or supporting arguments will be?
- Is my introduction an appropriate length (at least 4–5 sentences)?
- Did I double-check my introduction for spelling errors or typos, and is it formatted nicely?

## Writing Challenge

### INTRODUCE A #1 CLASSMATE

Imagine that you are going to write an essay about why one of your classmates is the best at something. He or she may be the **best skateboarder** or the **best cheesecake baker**. Decide what this person is the best at, and write an introductory paragraph about this student. Use the checklist before you share your introduction with your classmates and teacher.

### For Fun:

Read your introduction out loud, but replace your classmate's name with a quiet pause. Can everyone guess who you're introducing?