

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.

Writing Warm-Up

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?

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".

1. 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. _____

2. 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: _____

Types of Introductory Statements, continued

3. An Interesting Fact or Myth

You can hook your reader by introducing a fun fact or busting a common myth related to your topic.

An introductory statement can be more than one sentence, but be sure to keep it short and sweet.

TASK 3

Complete the following sentences for an introductory paragraph about *Dogs* (or any animal of your choice).

1. Did you know _____ ?
2. You've probably heard that _____ .
This is a myth. In reality _____ .
_____ .
3. You might think that _____ .
This is a myth. The truth is _____ .
_____ .

4. An Anecdote

People love reading or listening to true stories. An anecdote is a very short true story used to "set the scene" before a speech, paper, or blog post. It can be used to get a listener or reader interested in the topic so that they want to continue.

Note: Be careful how you write an anecdote. Your introduction can't be in the "first person" if the rest of your writing is in the third person. An anecdote should only be a few sentences long. Don't let it take over your introduction.

TASK 4

Imagine that you are writing an essay about *The Importance of Hard Work*. Write an anecdote about someone who had a tough job to do.

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.

1. 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?”

2. 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?”

3. 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, continued

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 it’s 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:

Thesis: _____

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.

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?

Teachers' Answer Key

NOTE:

We recommend using ESL Library's *How to Brainstorm* and *How to Write an Outline* lessons before starting this lesson. Some of the writing your students do in the brainstorming lesson can be used again in this lesson. This is a suggestion, not a prerequisite.

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn tips for writing introductory paragraphs. Students view some sample introductions and practice writing their own paragraphs. They also talk about first impressions.

LEVEL: Intermediate – Advanced

TAGS: writing, paragraph, introduction, introductory paragraph

Lesson Objective

Review the lesson objective with your students.

Writing Warm-Up

Give your students some time to do a bit of writing on the topic provided (first impressions). Remind them that this is free writing. They will not have to show anyone the writing, though you will discuss the content after. Discuss the follow-up questions in pairs or as a class.

Vocabulary Preview

Print copies of page 9 and cut out the strips, or have students do the matching exercise provided on page 1.

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. j | 3. d | 5. e | 7. g | 9. a |
| 2. f | 4. h | 6. c | 8. b | 10. i |

Introductory Statements

Review the types of introductory statements and assign the tasks that you want your students to do. You can decide if you want to assign all of the writing tasks in class. You may want to assign a task for homework. Review first person and third person narrative if necessary.

A Reader's Guide

Read through these tips together. Then put pens and books away and try this fun role-playing task. Encourage students to have fun critiquing each other's invisible introductions. They can be as positive or negative as they want to be. Add some more examples of positive or negative feedback on the board. You may also want to introduce the term "constructive criticism" (where the main intention is to help improve the product).

A Sample Introductory Paragraph

Thesis: The best time to visit the Big Apple is springtime.

My Introductory Paragraph

Give students time to work on their own draft of an introductory paragraph, or assign this task for homework. You may want to mention

that this writing will be shared with a classmate. Remind students to include a hook, a thesis statement, and a map for the reader.

Skimming for a First Impression

Give your students a short time to check their formatting and spelling. Then have students exchange papers. Give them exactly a minute (or less) to get a first impression of their classmate's introduction. What was their first impression?

Comprehension Check-In

1. A rhetorical question is a question that is supposed to make you think rather than give an answer. For example: Is wasting food a form of stealing from the poor? (*Examples will vary.*)
2. The first sentence in an introductory paragraph should hook the reader.
3. The main goal of the introductory paragraph is to get a reader interested in the topic.
4. An introductory paragraph should answer why, what, and how.
5. An introduction for a standard five-paragraph essay should be about five sentences.
6. A writer should not be scared of writing a thesis statement because it is simply a statement about the main argument of an essay or paper.
7. Poor formatting, spelling, or usage can ruin a reader's first impression of a piece of writing.

Writing Challenge

It is always helpful when teachers take part in the writing assignments. Why not work on your own introductory paragraph as your students are working on their own? Introduce a teacher from your school.

Note: You may want to review superlatives with your students. Try our Grammar Practice Worksheets lesson plan on Comparatives & Superlatives. http://esl-library.com/lessons.php?section_id=127

SPELLING NOTES:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it word this way: *Practise* (when used as a verb, *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.

Extra Vocabulary Practice (Optional)

Write definitions in your own words. Cut up these vocabulary strips.
Challenge a partner to match the vocabulary to your definition.

first impression

rhetorical question

hook

myth

anecdote

thesis statement

relevant

mapping statement

skim

critique