

THE INTRODUCTION OF AN ESSAY

THE INTRODUCTION:

An introduction has 2 functions in an essay. First, it contains the thesis statement and, therefore, tells the reader what central idea will be developed in the rest of the paper. Second, the introduction has to interest the reader enough that he or she will want to continue reading the paper.

Here are 6 basic methods for beginning your composition effectively. In each statement the thesis statement is italicized.

1. Begin with a single-sentence thesis statement.

A single –sentence thesis statement can be effective because it quickly and forcefully states the main idea of the essay:

Time management should be a required course at this college.

“Note how quickly and clearly a one-sentence thesis statement can inform the reader about what will follow in the rest of the essay.”

2. Begin with a general idea and then narrow to a specific thesis statement.

The general idea gives the reader background information or sets the scene. Then the topic narrows to one specific idea—the thesis statement. The effect is like a funnel, from wide to narrow.

Few Americans stay put for a lifetime. We move from town to city to suburb, from high school to college in a different state, from a job in one region to a better job elsewhere, from the home where we raise our children to the home where we plan to live in retirement. *With each move we are forever making new friends, who become part of our new life at that time.*

—Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, "On Friendship," in *A Way of Seeing*

What general idea precedes the thesis statement and then leads the reader to focus on the specific main point of the essay?

3. Begin with an illustration. One or more brief illustrations in the introduction of an essay make the thesis statement more concrete and vivid:

The other day I was watching a Reebok commercial. It was about a young male who, after purchasing a pair of sneakers, was walking down the street to a smooth jazz tune. As this

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"pretty boy" walked in his new pair of sneakers, he drew the attention of all in his path, especially the females. For a second I was envious of this "dude." I've been purchasing sneakers for over eighteen years, and I haven't had one girl look at me the way they did him during his thirty-second stroll down some dark and filthy sidewalk. As I watched this ad and others like it, I started to analyze the ads' underlying message. *I wondered why the majority of sneaker ads are geared to inner-city youth, especially ads for brand-name sneakers.*

—Saladin Brown (Student) "The Illusion of Ads"

“ Mr. Brown's thesis poses a question that his essay will try to answer.”

- What example does the writer provide to make the thesis statement more concrete?

4. Begin with a surprising fact or idea. A surprising fact or idea arouses the reader's curiosity about how you will support this initial startling statement.

Millions of law-abiding Americans are physically addicted to caffeine—and most of them don't even know it. Caffeine is a powerful central nervous system stimulant with substantial addiction potential. When deprived of their caffeine, addicts experience often severe withdrawal symptoms, which may include a throbbing headache, disorientation, constipation, nausea, sluggishness, depression, and irritability. As with other addictive drugs, heavy users develop a tolerance and require higher doses to obtain the expected effect.

—Tom Ferguson and Joe Graedon, "Caffeine,"
Medical Self-Care

“Why are the facts in this introduction likely to startle or surprise the reader?”

5. Begin with a contradiction. In this type of introduction, your thesis statement contradicts what many or most people believe. In other words, your essay will contrast your opinion with the widely held view.

Millions of parents take it as an article of faith that putting a bicycle helmet on their children, or themselves, will keep them out of harm's way. But new data on bicycle accidents raise questions about that. The number of head injuries has increased 10 percent since 1991, even as bicycle helmet use has risen sharply, according to figures compiled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. But given that ridership has declined over the same period, the rate of head injuries per active cyclist has increased 51 percent just as bicycle helmets have become widespread. What is going on here?

—Julian E. Barnes, "A Bicycling
Mystery: Head Injuries"

“What widely held view does the author open with?”

“ How does he contradict this idea?”

6. Begin with a direct quotation. A direct quotation is likely to catch your reader's attention and to show that you have explored what others have to say about the subject. You can then proceed to agree or to disagree with the direct quotation.

"Speech is silver; silence is golden," according to an old Swiss saying. In a close relationship, however, silence often loses value. If we speak about certain issues, we may endanger the relationship; but if we do not speak, the relationship may become static and tense until the silence takes on a life of its own. Such silences are corrosive. They eat at the innards of intimacy until, often, *the silence itself causes the very rupture or break-up that we've tried to avoid by keeping silent.*

—Adapted from Michael
Ventura, "Don't Even Think About It,"
Psychology Today

“ Does the author agree or disagree with the Swiss saying?”

Of course, definitions, comparisons, or any of the other kinds of devices you have already studied can also make good introductions. Just make sure that the reader knows exactly which sentence is your thesis statement.

Reference:

Fawcett, S. (2007). *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing with Readings*. (8th ed). Houghton and Mufflin.

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Prepared by Dr. Rita El Meouchy- DETE. NDU. Fall 2007.