

## The Introductory Paragraph: Common Methods of Introduction

**An introductory paragraph should do three things:**

- 1 Attract and “hook” the reader’s interest. Use one the suggested methods of introduction described below to draw your reader into your essay.
- 2 Present a *thesis statement*. Just as a topic sentence states the main point of a paragraph, the thesis statement gives the main idea that you will develop in your essay. Your thesis statement expresses your opinion on your topic and thus, has “attitude.”
- 3 Indicate a *plan of development*. This previews for the reader the major points that will support your thesis statement, listed in the order in which they will be presented in your essay.

### Methods of Introduction

Here are some common methods of introduction. Use one of these methods to introduce your subject in an interesting way.

- 1 **Broad statement.** Begin with a broad, general statement of your topic and narrow it down to your thesis statement (main point). A broad, general statement provides background information or an overview.

Ex: In an essay about your worse job ever, begin with an overview of several terrible jobs you have had, narrowing to the worst one of all.

- 2 **Contrast.** Begin with an idea or situation that is the opposite of the one you will develop. This can help to make your point by showing how terrible (or good) the opposite situation is.

Ex: In an essay about how today’s children defy their parents, begin by showing how different it was in earlier times.

- 3 **Relevance.** Begin by explaining the importance of your topic to your readers. If you can convince your readers that the subject applies to them in some way, or is something they should know more about, they will be interested in reading your essay.

Ex: Although not everyone plays sports or watches them on TV, America’s craze for sports affects nearly every American in significant ways.

- 4 **Anecdote.** Use an incident or brief story to grab your reader’s attention. The story should be brief and related to your central idea. Using an anecdote related to your topic can help illustrate (show) your main idea in a very dramatic way.

Ex: Rather than just list crime statistics, a brief incident from a victim’s experience (real or imagined) can help elicit emotions and get your readers feeling the way you want them to.

- 5 **Questions.** Ask your readers one or more (no more than three) *relevant* questions. These questions catch the readers' interest, involve them, and make them want to read on to find the answers. *Generally, avoid "Have you ever" questions*, especially ones that your reader is likely to answer with "no."

Ex: What would happen if we were really honest with ourselves? Would we be able to stand the pain of giving up self-deception? Would the complete truth be too much for us to bear?

- 6 **Quotation.** Using a short quotation in your introductory paragraph lets you add someone else's voice to your own—especially one of "authority." The quotation should be directly related to your topic and/or a literary work's theme or characters and should express your "attitude" on your topic.

Ex: "Evil," wrote Martin Buber, "is lack of direction." In my school days as a fatherless boy, I strayed down a number of dangerous paths.

### Which method should you use?

Use whichever method would best "hook" your readers' attention to your topic. For example:

- if you need to give background information so that the reader can understand your topic or your point, use a **Broad statement** introduction.
- if you have a topic that has a potentially dramatic effect, use an **Anecdote** to dramatize your point.
- if you have a topic that may not seem immediately relevant to all your readers, explain its importance in an introduction of **Relevance**.
- if you have a topic that would have dramatic consequences if it were another situation (such as abortion, failing school, child abuse, etc.), you can show "what would happen if" with a **Contrast** introduction.
- if you want your readers to imagine a horrible situation (such as the examples used in the Contrast method, above), ask your readers one to three pointed **Questions** to get them thinking and imagining, or wondering.
- if you want to appear to have "authority" behind your point of view, you can use a **Quotation** introduction. If you find the "perfect" saying to relate to your point of view, use it in your introduction.

**The bottom line: Experiment and see what works best!**