

The Introductory Paragraph

The OBJECTIVES of an introductory paragraph

1. Introduce the main point.
2. Get the reader to start thinking about the thesis.
3. Make the reader want to read the essay.

The FEATURES of a good introductory paragraph

1. It isn't too long.
2. It is simple (it's not complex or difficult; faulty language can make it difficult).
3. It doesn't include points which form the body of the essay (except the major points introduced in the thesis statement).
4. Every sentence (including the first sentence) is relevant to the essay's thesis, not just the topic.
5. Each sentence leads one step closer to the thesis statement.
6. It is in harmony with the essay: addresses the audience and sets the right tone.
7. It presents an informative thesis statement at the end of the paragraph.
8. Has originality; stimulates the reader to read the essay.

Common problems

In many introductory paragraphs from previous classes, the first sentence was not relevant to the thesis. The first sentence should, in fact, hint at the thesis. If the first sentence is too far away from the thesis, the introductory paragraph will have to be too long to bring the reader to the thesis. For example, with the thesis "Musical instruments are classified according to how they produce their sound," the first sentence should not be "Everyone likes music," because this is not relevant to the thesis. The sentence, "When I was in high school I hated music class" might be all right, but only if the next sentence says that the writer hated music class because it was so difficult to remember the names of all the instruments (and therefore relevant to the thesis); it would be a waste of space and time, though, if the next sentence stated that the students were not able to listen to music (which is not relevant to the thesis). The first sentence should have something to hint toward classification of musical instruments.

In some introductions, the first sentence is too "far" from the thesis. This means that the introductory paragraph will have to be too long.

Don't use the question technique if you can't think of a thought-provoking question. Yes-No questions and questions beginning with "Do you know...?" or "Have you ever wondered...?" are *usually* ineffective and uninteresting, because they can be answered too simply with either yes or no and therefore do not stimulate the reader to start thinking in the direction of the thesis.

A tip for your first sentence

Start the introduction paragraph with an idea that hints at the topic.
This will require that you have a concrete and specific definition of the essay's purpose, topic and thesis.

Introductory techniques and examples

1. Study carefully page 1 of "Introductory Techniques."
2. Study carefully pages 61-62 in *You're in Charge*.
3. Before class, complete the exercise, "Examples of Introductory Paragraphs."

Introductory Techniques

The first paragraph in an essay is called the introductory paragraph. Its purpose is two-fold: to introduce the subject of the essay, and to get the reader's attention. Here are some introductory techniques. Some of the techniques here are for the first sentence, and others are for the entire paragraph. You might use a combination of two or more techniques.

1. Dramatize or present part of an anecdote. (Refer to YIC, p. 61 A.) In the opening two to three sentences of your introduction, it is impossible to tell very much about anything, much less a complete story, but

you can present a representative part of it if you plan carefully. The part might consist of a glimpse of someone or something you will discuss later in your composition but wish to characterize beforehand, or it might be a highlight or preview of an incident you will present in a more complete form in your discussion.

2. Begin with a quotation. You may find a statement in such sources as plays, novels, short stories, poems, songs, newspapers, and magazines that you think captures or sums up an idea better than you can. The statement, properly acknowledged and set within quotations marks, may get your compositions off to a good start. Be careful that the quotation is not too long. Long quotations do not make lively introductory paragraphs.
3. Surprise with an unexpected point of view. (Refer to YIC, pp. 61-62 B.) One way to grab the reader's attention is begin your introduction with a point of view he doesn't expect or to contradict what you think he thinks is right or wrong. This kind of introduction is especially effective when you have exact facts and figures at your disposal.
4. Begin with a question. A rhetorical question is one to which no answer is expected or to which only one answer may be made—in this case, the answer presented in the thesis statement. The rhetorical question is a device to attract reader participation, that is, to engage the reader in thinking actively about the question asked before he is led to the writer's conclusion that is stated in the thesis statement. Use this technique with discretion. If you decide to begin your introduction with a question, make it a provocative and stimulating one.
5. Build background. (Refer also to YIC, p. 62 C and D.) Sometimes the most forceful way to lead to the thesis statement is to present background information in a series of statements that steadily build toward and strengthen the thesis statement. This method is effective because it involves the reader in the subject right from the beginning and continues to develop his interest until the climactic presentation of the thesis at the end of the introductory paragraph. This is perhaps one of the more difficult techniques because it calls for considerable knowledge of or experience with the subject as well as sensitivity and skill in building the paragraph with increasing intensity.