

Seven Ways to Write an Introduction

1. Funnel

In this style of introduction, a wide, general, opening statement gradually becomes more narrow, just like a funnel, which has a wide opening that narrows to a small spout. In a way, the information is funnelled to the thesis statement.

In a funnel introduction, the opening statement is general, then supporting statements make less general points and lead to the specific topic that is stated in the thesis statement. It is important to note that the following example introduction is two paragraphs long, which is common in introductions where it is necessary to develop the setting.

Example

I have absolutely no luck with apartments. No, that's not exactly true. The apartment in which I live is lovely, and I like it a lot. The problem rests with the apartment building itself. OK, let's narrow that down further. I have no complaint with the actual combination of concrete, bricks and mortar that makes up the apartment building. If I am completely honest, I must say that I have no luck with neighbours.

I seem to be cursed with noisy neighbours. They are perfectly nice people, but seem to have a different concept of noise pollution than I do. I can divide these noisy neighbours into three main categories: the Music Lovers, the Decorators, and the Building Inspectors. Although very different, they are bound together by a common goal — to drive me slowly but surely insane.

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2. Anecdote

An anecdote is a short story about something that happened, which illustrates the point you want to make in your essay. Using a story at the beginning of an essay is an effective way to interest the reader.

Example

I remember my dad grumbling about water going everywhere as he put the hose back in place. He had had the hose in just the right position, and if we hadn't been playing with it, the rink would have been flooded by now. To us kids, the thought of having our own ice rink to skate on was too exciting to make us stop and think about the hose. If it was a really cold night, then maybe by tomorrow morning we could start skating!

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3. Survey

In a survey introduction, the writer gives readers an overview of the information contained in the essay. A survey arouses the reader's interest by giving the reader a chance to agree or disagree with an opinion stated by the writer, and this entices the reader to continue with the essay.

Example

An increasingly popular area of research in the field of education revolves around individual learning styles. It is generally acknowledged that not every student will learn in the same way, as they all have their individual strengths, weaknesses and interests. In order to provide effective instruction, teachers must be aware of the different ways in which their students learn, and plan lessons that will enhance the learning experience in their classrooms.

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4. Quotation

Quotations are used when someone has clearly and succinctly stated an opinion you agree with and that will give the reader a clear idea of your point. For this, the quotation needs to be relevant to the topic and familiar to the reader. Quotations can be used independently or combined with other types of introductions such as anecdotes or questions. A well-chosen quotation adds credibility to an essay because it is familiar to the reader and its truth has been recognized for many years.

Example

They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Absence also makes the eyes see more clearly. At least, it makes your eyes see once-familiar things in a new light. If you have lived in a city all your life, it becomes so familiar to you that you don't really see it, certainly not in the same way that a visitor would. I spent five years living in Asia, and when I returned to Canada, I saw my native country with the eyes of a visitor. Things that once were very familiar to me looked strange, even foreign. Changes had, quite naturally, occurred, but so gradually that the average resident perhaps did not even notice. But I, with my tourist's eyes, was struck by the marked differences in day-to-day Canadian life. While I had been away, Canada had discovered coffee.

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5. Question

Asking a question at the beginning of an essay is a useful tool for drawing the reader in. The question can be used to intrigue the reader, or it can set the tone for the essay. The writer can ask a question in the introduction and then wrap the essay around the answer. It is best to use Information Questions rather than Yes/No Questions. Questions, when written correctly, are great for hooking the reader.

Example

Who would willingly plunge into water that never gets warmer than ten degrees Celsius? Surprisingly, many British Columbian scuba divers jump at this opportunity twelve months a year. This may surprise many divers who only consider the sport in the context of the white sand beaches, cloudless skies, and tepid azure waters of the Caribbean or Southeast Asia; when one thinks "diving", one naturally thinks "tropics". Thus, British Columbia may well be the last place one would associate with this exciting water sport. Although serious scuba divers might assume that the cold, dark, West Coast waters would not have much to offer them, they should consider Vancouver Island as a diving destination because it offers peace of mind, a wide variety of dive sites, and a plethora of animal life.

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6. Setting the Scene

Creating a mental picture for the reader helps introduce essays. Using words that describe how things smell, look, feel, sound and taste raises the reader's curiosity and draws the reader to read more.

Example

It's everywhere you look. Dispensed on almost every street corner and found in almost every home. Cups of it are held in the hands of workers, students, homemakers and movie stars. North Americans love their coffee. What is it about this brew that makes it so popular? In North America today, coffee is not only a physical stimulant; it is also a fashion accessory and the focal point of many social functions.

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7. Definition

When a difficult or unknown term is going to be used throughout the essay, defining that term can serve as an introduction to the essay. The following example explains the two acronyms TOEFL and TOEIC, as well as giving more information about the tests. Definition paragraphs define difficult terms or ideas, which are used throughout the essay.

Example

TOEFL and TOEIC are acronyms frequently heard in the field of English language study, but what are they? TOEFL, or Test of English as a Foreign Language, is an academic test of a student's level of listening, reading and writing. Although TOEIC is a test of English as well, it is more specifically a Test of English for International Communication. Both these tests evaluate students' English proficiency, but they are completely different in nature, content and focus.