

Structure of the Opening or Introductory Paragraph

- Hook/lead-in/attention-getter
- Background information (context)
- Significance of subject
- Thesis statement

2 Opening Paragraphs

An introduction exists as the first paragraph in a 5-page essay, and it serves the following purposes:

- Establishes reader interest.
- Introduces the general topic of the essay while establishing the writer's voice, tone, or attitude, toward the subject.
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs. Establishing Reader Interest Introductions should begin with an engaging lead or opener (sometimes called a "hook" in middle school or high school) that is devised to evoke readers' interest. Capturing readers' attention motivates them to continue reading. Writers can garner a reader's interest by doing the following:
 - Beginning by quoting an expert on the respective topic or an inspirational individual.
 - Beginning by offering some statistical evidence that is both informative and intriguing.
 - Opening with a striking mental image.
 - Appealing to the reader's emotions.
 - Raising a question or series of questions.
 - Presenting an explanation or rationalization for the essay.
 - Including a personal anecdote.
- Stating in the middle of a story with the conclusion of the story existing as the first sentence in the conclusion paragraph.

Transition Sentences

After the opener or hook, writers need to add transition sentences that should introduce the readers to the topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. These important sentences help readers move or “transition” from the hook toward the thesis statement.

A Strong Thesis Statement

An introduction usually contains a thesis statement (i.e., the main point of the essay). A thesis statement is a promise to the reader about what the essay will be about. A thesis is not the topic itself, but rather the writer’s angle on the topic. For whatever topic a professor gives, writers must ask themselves, “What do I want to say about it?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful, and confident. A thesis is usually one sentence long and appears toward the end of the introduction. It is specific, and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how the writer will organize the information.

Specificity

A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. The creation of a thesis statement begins when writers choose a broad subject and then narrow it down until they have pinpointed a specific aspect of that topic. For example, healthcare is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic and essentially answer the following question. “What are the options for individuals without healthcare coverage?”

Precision

A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic pertains to options for individuals without healthcare coverage, then the precise thesis statement must make an exact, related, claim, such as the following: “Limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers.”

To elaborate on this topic further, the writer might discuss how limited options impact the lives of the uninsured.

Ability to be Argued

A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement is often not considered arguable. A thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence. However, a wise way to think about a thesis statement within a persuasive or “argumentative” essay is to write one that strikes up or furthers a conversation versus creating an argument. Imagine someone reading only your thesis statement and the two of you, then, having a conversation in which you share your stance, your reader shares his or her stance, and you continue your discussion with the information from your body paragraphs.

Ability to be Demonstrated

For any claim in the thesis, the writer must be able to provide reasons and examples for this opinion. Personal observations can help, or the writer can consult outside sources to demonstrate validity. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details. The demonstration of validity comes from incorporating the voices of the experts—those who have already had their work on your topic published, vetted, and added to the respective canon. Use the strategies of quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing. Remember that the only way to hit a word or page requirement when writers feel like they have already said everything is to add examples.

Forcefulness

A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that the writer is, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose. That being said, college-level thesis statements would do well to not include the word “should,” as a means of trying to sound authoritative so as to make a solid argument.

Confidence

In addition to using forcefulness in their thesis statement, writers must also be confident in their claims. Phrases such as “I feel” or “I believe” actually weaken the readers’ sense of confidence in what they are reading because these phrases

imply that the writer may be the only person who feels this way. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades readers to have faith in the argument and to open their minds to the point of view of the writer. So, no thesis should contain phrases such as “in my opinion” or “I believe.” These statements reduce credibility and weaken the argument. Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the requirements: specificity, precision, ability to be argued, ability to be demonstrated, forcefulness, and confidence.

- The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the 1986 play *Fences* symbolize the challenges faced by black men who lived through segregation and integration in the United States, and their life stories can be considered as critical to understand the challenge black men continue to face over thirty years later.
- Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one idea proposed so as to deal with illegal immigration; however, contemporary strategies regarding this issue do not address the essential human right for safety along with the essentials of food, clothing, and shelter.
- J. D. Salinger’s character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused and somewhat rebellious young person who voices his disgust with “phonies.” Yet, in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions making him a complicated character within one of Salinger’s most celebrated novels.
- Compared to an absolute divorce, a no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown, although no divorce is easy since the issues involved extend well beyond the monetary and are usually based in an unfortunate undercurrent of misunderstandings and sorrow.
- Discussing the dangers of illegal drug use is with elementary and middle school students is one method that schools use to help dissuade young people from abusing drugs as they grow up. However, children learn a great deal from what they observe making it imperative that parents monitor what their children watch on tv, see in....