

WRITING EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTIONS

Effective introductions do two basic things—grab the reader’s interest and let the reader know what is to come. This is why effective introductions usually incorporate the **thesis statement** and lead up to that statement with one of a variety of **hooks**. The **hook** you select will have a lot to do with the **purpose** of the essay you are writing. The following are a variety of techniques you can use as hooks in your introduction.

SHORT NARRATIVE OR ANECDOTE

This type of hook tells a **short descriptive story illustrating the point you will be trying to make**. This type of hook is particularly effective in persuasive essays because it allows the writer to use **vivid description** which **appeals** to the **senses and emotions** of the reader. The reader experiences the horror or delight of the subject of the narrative and, therefore, has already begun to be open to your arguments. For example, if you wish to convince your readers that laws requiring children to wear helmets while riding bicycles should be more strictly enforced, you might describe in **vivid detail** an innocent child who has suffered brain damage or who died **gruesomely** as a result of not wearing a helmet. The **more vivid** the detail, the **more sympathetic** the reader will be to your cause. Logic will be needed to support your claim, but the **emotional appeal** of the short descriptive narrative makes your readers **more receptive** to reading what you have to say.

STARTLING STATISTIC

One of the problems that many writers face is how to get their readers to feel that the information or opinions presented are **pertinent** or **relevant to their readers**. Using **startling statistics** can help solve that problem. Many people feel that any number of life’s crises cannot or will not happen to them. Bad things happen to other people—not us. Making startling statistics personally relevant can open readers’ minds to the possibility of tragedy hitting home and, thus, make readers more receptive to your message. For example, stating that “four billion people are diagnosed with HIV” is startling; however,

stating that in any give college classroom, statistically “one in every four students will be diagnosed HIV positive,” is much more **personally relevant** statistic. They are the sort of statements which make one stop and ponder—**and want to read more**.

QUOTATION LEAD

Drawing upon the insightful words of famous writers or other celebrities can prove an effective way to get a reader’s attention. By borrowing upon the credibility of the world renowned, a writer’s own credibility is enhanced. Using a **quotation lead** can help **enhance a writer’s credibility** and/or **connect readers with the familiar**. Both of these benefits help writers to **hook** readers, getting them to read on. However, in order to be effective, a writer must select a well known quotation or one which is particularly insightful. Saying “Joe Blow said...” just doesn’t cut it.

HISTORICAL OR BACKGROUND LEAD

Sometimes in order to accept the information the writer is presenting, the reader must understand the historical context or significance of that information. Knowing one’s audience is necessary in order for a writer to know whether or not this type of lead could be effective. Many historians and scientists and other academians find a historical perspective fascinating; however, many general audiences could get bogged down and lose interest before the author’s thesis is even stated. Just be careful not to get so wrapped up in the background that you forget what you originally wanted to say.