

# WRITING INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS HANDOUT

The introductory paragraph is the first paragraph of an essay. Its purpose is to be so inviting that the reader will not want to stop reading. In all college essays, this introductory paragraph contains a thesis statement.

Some instructors and courses require the student to use a 1-3-1 essay format. The essay consists of an introductory paragraph with a three-point thesis statement, three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

Included in this packet are sample thesis statements, sample introductory paragraphs, and exercises.

## WHAT IS A THESIS?

The thesis of an essay is a statement of the main idea of that essay. It is the statement of what the writer is going to explain, defend, or prove about his topic. It is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph.

The thesis statement is a complete sentence that presents a viewpoint about the topic, which can be defended or shown in the essay. A thesis statement should not be a simple statement of fact.

Examples: Read each of the following statements. If you think the statement is a **fact**, mark it with an **F**. If you think the statement is a **thesis**, mark it with a **T**.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In the United States, kindergarten is not compulsory.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Putting a child into kindergarten before he or she is physically or emotionally ready can have several unfortunate effects on a child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. In some European countries, children do not begin formal schooling until age seven or eight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Many students in community colleges have part-time jobs while they are going to school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Working a part-time job while going to school puts an enormous strain on a person for a variety of reasons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Five actions need to be taken to save the grizzly bear from extinction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. To save the grizzly bear, we need laws from Congress, the cooperation of hunters and campers, and an educated general public.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. It is estimated that approximately 200 grizzly bears live in Yellowstone National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The discovery of many artifacts in Russell Cave has changed some of the theories previously held about life in North America thousands of years ago.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Russell Cave is the oldest known home of human beings in the southeastern United States.

## THESIS PRACTICE

Which thesis in each pair would be most helpful to the writer of a 500-word essay?

1.    A.    Chinatown in San Francisco will remain a ghetto as long as its population increases, its wages are substandard, and its citizens experience discrimination.  
      B.    The Chinatowns in big cities like Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco remain ghettos because of cultural problems.
2.    A.    Few people are prepared to live in the California wilderness, as interviews with several rescue scouts have indicated.  
      B.    Survival in the California wilderness depends on three main factors: physical fitness, proper clothing, and knowledge of edible plants.
3.    A.    Rod McKuen writes of love, loneliness, and nostalgia in a shallow free verse.  
      B.    The poetry of Rod McKuen has popular appeal because, like Shakespeare's sonnets, the reader recognizes the emotions portrayed since they are stereotypical.

Try to develop thesis statements of your own on the following topics:

1.    Television -
2.    Capital punishment -
3.    Mandatory drug testing -

## ATTENTION GETTING DEVICES

The first several sentences of an introductory paragraph should consist of attention getting or interest sentences. Below are several examples of different techniques which may be used to lead the reader to the thesis statement, which is the final one or two sentences of the introductory paragraph.

### 1. NARRATION

Harry Houdini, the great escape artist, never ran out of ways to attract the interest of the general public. Even the events surrounding his death demonstrate his flair for the dramatic. According to an often quoted story, Houdini, just before he died, told his wife that he would communicate with her from "the other side." From his death to just before her death in 1943, when she gave up trying to reach him, this promise kept his widow from fading into obscurity. It was this ability to stimulate the interest of the public that also served him well in life, particularly during his performances. *Houdini, a successful showman, knew how to captivate his spectators.* He could excite them with the danger and suspense of his acts, amuse them with unexpected touches of humor, or stimulate their curiosity.

### 2. FACTUAL DATA OR STATISTICS

Harry Houdini, the great escape artist was born in 1874. There has been some controversy over where he was born. Some biographers argue Budapest, Hungary; others, however, support his claim of having been born in Appleton, Wisconsin. This controversy notwithstanding, Houdini's real name was Erich Weiss, and at an early age Erich demonstrated an uncanny grasp of the art of trapeze flying. As he grew older, he became fascinated with magic and with the fantastic tricks of such performers as the French magician Robert-Houdini, from whose name he later derived Houdini. It was from such magicians that he also gained his showmanship. *Houdini, a successful showman, knew how to captivate his spectators.* He could excite them with the danger and suspense of his acts, amuse them with unexpected touches of humor, or stimulate their curiosity.

### 3. QUOTATION

In his article on "conjuring" in the 1926 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the great master of escape Harry Houdini asserted that he owed his success to his "great physical strength and the fact that he [was] slightly bowlegged." But when one reads about the remarkable career of this amazing performer, one finds the man's showmanship more impressive than his athletic attributes. *Houdini, a successful showman, knew how to captivate his spectators.* He could excite them with the danger and suspense of his acts, amuse them with unexpected humor, or stimulate their curiosity.

#### 4. STARTLING STATEMENT

It has been said that each of us, at one time or another, considers committing suicide. But the real tragedy is that each year more than half a million people not only contemplate suicide but actually succeed in taking their own lives. *This high suicide rate is influenced by a number of factors.* Among them are psychological states, sociological conditions, and ineffective means of prevention.

#### 5. GENERAL STATEMENTS

Mention life insurance to most people, and they confess that they are confused about the subject. Some even swear that their insurance agent had to get special training to deal with the difficult language of life insurance. *People need not be confused, however, because there are actually only three basic types of life insurance--ordinary life, term life, and endowment life--and each has features designed to meet particular requirements.*

Fast-food restaurants are becoming more and more popular in the United States. The rapid pace of contemporary society and the need of those "on the go" for quick meals bring the American public through the doors of fast-food restaurants in ever-increasing numbers. No longer is the fast-food restaurant primarily a hangout for teenagers. On the contrary, during recent years people of all ages have come to rely on fast-food outlets as a means of satisfying their appetite for the all-American meal of hamburger, French fries, and soft drink. Playing host to such a mass of hungry drop-ins is bound to put a strain on those who work in a fast-food restaurant. *Of the different types of customers who frequent fast-food restaurants, some are more welcome than others.* In particular, three types of customers become very familiar to those who must serve them: the impatient ones, the picky ones, and--perhaps the salvation of the employees--the easy-to-please ones.

#### 6. COMBINATION

Born in 1874, the great escape artist, Harry Houdini lived in an age that, as a result of new advances in science, was fascinated with the unusual and inexplicable. The Great Houdini took advantage of his audience's taste, performing seemingly impossible tasks and reaping their wonder and appreciation. If his audiences had only known the most of what they saw during a performance was easily accomplishable for a "slightly bowlegged" man of "great physical strength," they might not have been quite so impressed. *Houdini, however, was a successful showman who knew how to captivate his spectators.* He could excite them with the danger and suspense of his acts, amuse them with unexpected touches of humor, or stimulate their curiosity.

Factual detail

Generalization  
Generalization  
Generalization

Quotation

## WHAT NOT TO SAY IN YOUR INTRODUCTION

1. Avoid telling the reader that you are beginning your essay:

In this essay, I will discuss . . .

I will talk about . . .

I am going to prove . . .

2. Do not apologize in your paper:

Although I am not an expert . . .

In my humble opinion . . .

3. Do not refer to later parts of your essay:

By the end of this essay one will agree . . .

In the next paragraph people will see . . .

4. Do not use trite expressions. Since they have been so overused, they will lack interest. Using such expression shows that you have not taken time to use your own words to express your ideas. Some examples of trite expressions are:

busy as a bee

you can't tell a book from its cover

haste makes waste

5. Do not make your introduction too long. This paragraph usually needs about half as many sentences as your body paragraphs. (The length of the introduction may vary in proportion to the length of the essay. A long 2,000 word research paper may require a longer introduction.)
6. Do not use second person you as if your reader were sitting next to you.