



CHAPTER FIVE

I'm Having Trouble with My Introduction.



The first day of school, the first day on a new job, a first date—starting out can be hard. Starting a piece of writing can also be difficult, even if you have generated plenty of ideas. However, the strategies in this chapter can help. In the sample introductions below, the thesis statements are underlined as a study aid. Be sure to notice that the thesis can come at the beginning, middle, or end of the introduction.



EXPLAIN WHY YOUR TOPIC IS IMPORTANT

Let your readers know why your topic is important, and you can engage their interest. Say your essay will explain to residents of your town how they can eliminate cigarette advertising on billboards. Your introduction can explain why residents should want to eliminate this advertising in the first place, like this:

Other than the tobacco companies and a few nicotine addicts who live in denial, few people dispute the fact that cigarettes are a serious—even a deadly—health hazard. Because cigarettes are so dangerous, laws prohibit their advertising on television. Unfortunately, a similar ban does not exist for all print media. As a result, many people are enticed to begin smoking after viewing the ads that promise everything from “pure smoking pleasure” to fun, friends, and romance. Thus, we should lobby local officials to ban cigarette advertising on billboards in our town.



PROVIDE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What should your reader know to appreciate or understand your topic? What information would establish a context for your essay? The answers to these questions can provide background information in the introduction. For example, assume you will argue that more federal money should be spent to educate children about the

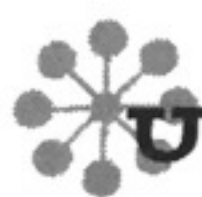
dangers of tobacco. Your introduction could supply background information about past efforts in this area, like this:

In the 1990s President Clinton began an initiative to reduce tobacco use by children. In 1995, the FDA attempted to reduce the appeal of cigarette advertising to young people by limiting ads to black and white, text-only and by prohibiting cigarette ads on billboards near schools. Nonetheless, the effects have been insufficient, and the public health crisis continues as children start smoking at younger ages. Clearly, the federal government must devote considerably more money and resources to educating children about tobacco.



Tell a story that is related to your topic or that illustrates your thesis. For example, if your essay shows that modern conveniences can be more trouble than they are worth, the following introduction with a story could be effective:

The morning of my job interview, I woke up an hour earlier than usual and took special pains with my hair and makeup. I ate a light, sensible breakfast, which managed to hit bottom despite the menagerie of winged insects fluttering around my stomach. I drove the parkway downtown, nervously biting my lower lip the whole way. I had to park three long blocks from the office building where the interview was to take place, and by the time I got to the building I was completely windblown. Breathless, I gasped my name to the receptionist, who explained that my interview would have to be postponed. The personnel director had never made it in. It seems her electricity was off, and she could not get her car out of the garage because the door was controlled by an electric opener. That's when I knew for sure that modern conveniences can be downright inconvenient.



USE AN INTERESTING QUOTATION

If someone has said something applicable to your thesis and said it particularly well, you can engage interest by quoting the remark. Just be sure that the quotation is interesting and not an overused expression like "better safe than sorry" or "the early bird gets the worm." Here is an example:

Everyone seems to agree that we learn from our mistakes and that failure can be more instructive than success. Why, then, are students denied the opportunity to repeat courses without penalty? So that we can profit from our mistakes, the administration should allow students to take courses three times and record the highest grade on our transcripts. After all, as General Colin Powell has said, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."

❁ PROVIDE RELEVANT STATISTICS

Relevant statistics, particularly if they are surprising, can engage a reader.

According to our campus newspaper, this college has spent \$25 million for campus renovations in the past five years. During the same period, enrollment has dropped by 2,273 students, and 112 fewer people are employed here. These figures suggest that the administration cares more about buildings than people. It is time to reverse the trend and work to increase enrollment, faculty, and staff.



When you quote someone or use a statistic—whether you do so in your introduction or elsewhere in your essay—you must indicate the source. Notice that in the sample introductions above, the source of the quotation is given with the words “as General Colin Powell has said,” and the source of the statistic is given with the words “According to our campus newspaper.”

❁ FIND COMMON GROUND WITH YOUR READER

Identify a point of view or experience you and your reader share. Presenting this common ground in an introduction can create a bond between you and your reader. In the following introduction, the common ground is a shared school experience:

If we abolish compulsory attendance, everyone will be better off. Think back to when you were in high school. Remember the kids who caused all the trouble, the ones who disrupted the teacher and made it difficult for the rest of the class to learn? They were the students who did not want to be in school anyway and made things miserable for the students who did want to be there. Now imagine how much more learning would have occurred if the troublemakers had been allowed to quit school and get jobs.

❁ DESCRIBE SOMETHING

Description adds interest and liveliness to writing.

At 5 feet 3 inches and 170 pounds, Mr. Daria looked like a meatball. His stringy black hair, always in need of a cut, kept sliding into his eyes, and his too-tight shirts would not stay tucked into his too-tight polyester pants. He wore