

INTRODUCTIONS

Use your introduction to attract the reader but also to do important groundwork for your paper. You will seldom write a paper requiring more than one short introductory paragraph. An effective introduction creates interest; it hooks the reader into the essay or story. It sketches out the territory to be covered, often by narrowing down a more general subject. It sets the tone (i.e., formal or informal) for the rest of the essay. Above all, it heads straight for the central idea (or thesis) to be developed in the rest of the paper.

Some common ways of introducing a theme are usually ineffective:

- * A **repetition**, often word for word, of the assignment.
- * A **colorless summarizing statement**: *There are many qualities that the average college graduate looks for in a job. Most of them probably consider the following important. . . .*
- * An **unsupported claim to interest**: *Migratory birds are a fascinating subject. Ever since I was a little child, I have been interested in the migration of birds. Studying them has proved a wonderful hobby.*
- * **Complaints or apologies**: *I find it hard to discuss prejudice in a paper of 500 words. Prejudice is a vast subject.*

EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTORY STRATEGIES

1. Relate subject to a topical event or current trend:

The Doom Boom

Until a few years ago, sex was a taboo topic; now death is being freed of its taboos, at least as a subject for frank talk. In a sense, death has come into fashion. In polite society, the act of dying no longer need be hinted at as "passing away." As opportunists discover that the hearse is a good bandwagon to jump on, the subject may even become overexploited. But the abuses that occur are far outweighed by the benefits. --Life.

2. Start with striking outward signs or symptoms of a trend or situation:

Patriotism Back in Style

Across the land, people are turning out in record numbers for holidays such as Flag Day and the Fourth of July. High school students are again entering patriotic essay contests sponsored by service organizations. ROTC programs, once scorned, are making a comeback on college campuses. Old-time patriotism is coming back into style.

3. Start with a dramatic case that leads into a discussion of a more general situation:

The Return of the Moth

Everywhere trees stood defoliated, stripped of all leaves. Sticky little creatures hung from branches and created a sickly coating on roads. People rushed to their doctors with rashes on their hands and faces. Gypsy moth caterpillars had once again infested the Northeast in record numbers. Plagues like the gypsy moth remind us that the age-old war between human beings and the insects that destroy crops or vegetation is far from won.

4. Approach a general subject from a personal perspective. Show your personal interest in or qualifications for the subject:

The Immigrant's America

*My grandparents, unknown to one another, arrived in America from the same county in Slovakia. My grandfather had a small farm in Pennsylvania; his wife died in a wagon accident. Meanwhile, a girl of fifteen arrived on Ellis Island, dizzy, a little ill from witnessing births and deaths and illnesses aboard the crowded ship, with a sign around her neck lettered "PASSAIC." There an aunt told her of the man who had lost his wife in Pennsylvania. She went. They were married. . . . I heard this story only weeks ago. Strange that I had not asked insistently before. Odd that I should have such shallow knowledge of my roots. --Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics**

5. Use a striking contrast to lead up to your key point:

We Are What We Wear

The late sixties was the height of the love affair between the media and youth. Movies, magazines, pop music, and advertising extolled the teenage girl--a long-haired, blank-faced disco-dancing adolescent wearing a mini-skirt and thin as a stick. Today, most women no longer want to look like teenagers. The new idea is the woman with both a career and a family. She's in her thirties or forties; she has character--you can see it in her face. The media are struggling toward a new image of the mature woman, wearing a classic suit.

6. Approach a serious subject from a humorous human angle:

Shelter from the Storm

*"Pinniped Liberation Front" proclaims the frame around Peigin Barrett's license plate, in homage to flippered creatures everywhere. Barrett laughs about this and about the license itself, which carries the phone number of the Marine Mammal Center, 331-SEAL. Barrett, executive director of the center, is totally absorbed in her work: to nurse sick and injured seals and sea lions back to good health, then release them back to the wild. --Linda Currey Post, *San Francisco Focus*.*