

Introductory Paragraph: Hook Strategies

A good introductory paragraph is between 4-7 sentences in length, begins with a hook strategy (quote, unusual fact/statistic, thoughtful, relevant questions, or a personal story), and ends with a clear thesis statement. Not only should your hook serve to immediately grab the readers' interest, but it should be a natural lead-in to your thesis, and a meaningful opportunity for the reader to relate to the topic of your essay.

The following are four hook strategies for you to practice. First consider which issue/prompt you are focusing on for your essay. Then identify the major ideas or themes presented by your issue and apply those to each strategy:

1. The personal anecdote/story:

Note: Yes, it would be natural to use "I" for this strategy, but there are ways to do this effectively without using personal pronouns.

2. Ask three thought provoking, universal questions (NOT the question/questions posed in essay prompt):

Note: Avoid the implied "you" when presenting these questions to the reader. Do you plan to answer these questions? When? At the end of your hook or will you revisit and answer in your conclusion?

3. Quotation, song lyric, or short poem:

Note: This does not necessarily mean a quote from the text. In fact, I recommend you save textual evidence for your body paragraphs. Can you think of a famous quote that relates to your topic? How?

4. Unusual, bizarre, or interesting fact or statistic:

Note: Again, the fact or statistic would have to relate to the topic you're discussing. Could be a modern-day fact or statistic or perhaps an interesting fact from Shakespeare's time?

Sample Introductory Paragraphs

Here are sample introductory paragraphs that involve these hook strategies. See if you can identify what the paper will discuss based on the *thesis*.

1. The personal anecdote/story:

Example (Topic: George Washington):

It seemed that all they did was drive, and each time they stopped it was to visit another site. That morning in Washington D.C. was different. They stepped out of their hotel and walked four or five blocks. Suddenly, she was amazed by all that surrounded her: the Capitol building off in the distance, the White House to my left, a vast field of grass and two ponds reflecting a towering white monument. “What’s that?” she asked her dad, and he responded, “That’s the monument of George Washington.” Her mind started to wonder, “A monument, a city named in his honor? This must be someone who made a difference.” Through his courage, leadership, and patriotism, George Washington was able to accomplish so much.

2. Ask three questions:

Example (Topic: Agribusiness is devouring the small farmer):

Is it true that bigger is always better? Could it be that society’s insatiable desire for more is in many ways giving people less? Once society has accepted the premise that more choice is better, is it possible to reverse that trend? For small, local, family-owned businesses, more and bigger has been anything but better.

3. Quotation, song lyric or poem:

Example (Topic: Women in politics)

“There cannot be true democracy unless women’s voices are heard” (Hillary Rodham Clinton). A democracy is a system of government that places the power in the hands of the people. If individuals in a given society are not granted equal access and representation, then that government cannot claim to be a true democracy. The lack of female voices in the United States Government creates an imbalance of power based on gender. Despite the smaller percentage of women currently involved in high level government positions, pioneers like Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Condoleezza Rice are leading the way towards gender equality in politics.

4. Unusual or bizarre fact:

Example (Topic: Choosing a lifelong career)

Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, could spend one million dollars per day, every day, seven days a week and would not run out of money until he was 311 years old! Most would agree that he has reached a point of financial security. In fact, it would be almost impossible to figure out how one could spend one million dollars per day. For most Americans, finding an occupation that is satisfying, earning enough money to live comfortably, and figuring out a realistic blend between work and leisure are three essential factors in beginning one’s career.