

Attention Getters: Bait Your Hook and Lure 'Em In

Effective Writing

An attention-getter (A-G) is the first part of the introduction. As the name implies, it must grab the attention of readers to entice them to read on. If the A-G is one sentence, it must be a heck of a sentence. Most A-G's are at least 2-4 sentences, depending on the technique you use and topic. They should surprise, surprise, tickle the readers in an instant or they'll get away.

You must lead from the attention-getter smoothly into the rest of the introduction, which leads to the topic sentence (paragraph) or thesis statement (essay). The goal is to funnel down smoothly so that the A-G doesn't lose its power.

Some writers write the introduction after they have written the entire paragraph or essay. However, the topic sentence (TS) or thesis statement must be written before you start so that the focus is clear. Remember, though, that the TS or thesis is always at the end of the introduction.

If you have a strong introduction, it is easier to write a conclusion that comes back to that creative idea you used in the introduction.

Do not put any of the main points from the body of the paper into the introduction.

DO NOT BEGIN WITH A QUESTION.

- 1) You're opening up the possibility for readers to say, "No," and then they will tune you out.
- 2) Often they are boring and cliché and we *have* thought if it before! Be creative.

IF YOU FIND YOU HAVE USED A QUESTION, JUST CHANGE IT INTO DECLARATIVE STRUCTURE.

Nope: Have you ever thought that dogs' tails are really neckties for their butts? **Yup:** Most people have probably never considered that dogs' tails are really neckties for their butts.

PURPOSE

- 1) To catch the attention and interest of the readers so that they want to read on
- 2) To reveal the topic of the paragraph/essay and perhaps the manner in which it will be developed (compare/contrast, classification, definition, persuasive, etc.). It will also set the tone of the writing: serious, humorous, sarcastic, etc.

METHODS

- 1) **Start with a startling statement, fact, or statistic which will arrest the readers' attention to surprise, horrify, anger, or amuse them into reading more. Use exaggeration where appropriate but don't be obnoxious.**

Humor (Exaggerate): Our neighbors have all moved away —again, and it's all Mom's fault—again. Their subtle hints and then outright criticism went right over her head. First it was Christmas wreaths in July, and then it was plastic eggs in December. (TS) Leaving holiday decorations up during the wrong season can cause many problems.

Horrify: Imagine a line of dead and mangled bodies stretching for twenty-five miles—25,000 corpses. That is the number of victims of drunk driving every year. It's hard to believe that the number is increasing in spite of the ads and community awareness efforts. (TS) The time has come to take more specific measures to get drunk drivers off the road.

Startle: Buyers beware! A suit, shined shoes, a Rolex, Old Spice, and a dazzling smile don't make someone an expert. People should not let smooth-talking advertisers, manufacturers, and car salesmen sell them the wrong car. (TS) They can get the car that's just right for them if they follow this advice.

- 2) **Start with a direct quotation from a recognized authority, a famous person or a literary selection.**

Authority: "Drinking kills more young drivers than any other cause," says John Smith, head of Wisconsin highway safety. "Their corpses litter the highways of America every night." Sadly, many think that there is nothing they can do about this except have their own designated driver or take friends' and family members' keys away. (TS) However, studies have shown that cell phones save more people from drunken driving than most people would imagine.

Literary work: "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tufffet... along came a spider..." She was lucky it wasn't a brown recluse spider. Now found as far north as Wisconsin, this spider sports a nasty bite that unless treated correctly can cause death. (TS) It's easy to avoid being bitten by following these steps.

Famous person: Beloved American author Mark Twain once said, "Man is the only animal that blushes... or needs to." My brother is living proof of this observation. He has perfected the art of "putting his foot in his mouth" on any occasion.

"I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception." Groucho Marx was a master of insults that most found hilarious, as long as the jibes weren't directed at them. So make sure no one says this to you because you are not enhancing your best facial features. (TS) Applying makeup correctly every day can keep the Grouchos away.

Go to Google and type in quotations about your topic. If you use one, be sure you make a connection between the point of the quotation and your topic as I did in the preceding example.

NOTE that none of these examples used the expression, "This quotation means that (says that)..." or "These words by Mark Twain show that..." Be smoother.

3) Start with a verbal picture that relates to the topic. Do not begin "Picture this.." or "Imagine this.."

The young driver turns up the stereo louder and smiles as he dreams of the fun he had at the party—plenty of good music and beer. Suddenly a tree appears from out of nowhere. He grabs at the wheel to turn the car. Headlights swerve in the darkness. But it's too late. A patrol car screams to find the twisted body of another kid who drank and drove. (TS) Teenagers need to understand the effects of alcohol on their adolescent bodies.

Volcanoes spewed gases into the sky. As heat and gas rose into the atmosphere, massive clouds formed, blotting out the sun. From one end of the globe to the other, lightning storms cracked and flashed. This is what the earth was like four and a half billion years ago. As if that scene isn't amazing enough, it's even moreso that scientists know this. (TS) The techniques they use to establish theories like this are fascinating.

4) Start with a contrast.

A third-grade class gallops through a daisy-filled meadow with butterfly nets. A ninth-grade Latin class floods the zoo for a lesson in scientific names. High school seniors ride the Demon at Great America for physics class. (TS) A field trip may look like time set aside for fun and games, and most students prefer them to regular classes, but serious examination will show that they educate in a way textbooks and lectures never can.

If you think being big is the name of the game in the NBA, you're right. (Some may think being big is the name of the game in the NBA, and they are right.) The typical pro basketball player looks like a skyscraper wearing size 18 sneakers. But that doesn't mean there isn't room for the little guy with big talent. (TS) Muggsy Bogues, at 5'5" tall, has played an integral part in the success of his team.

The adrenaline rush that accompanies a fast, successful run down the ski hill stays with skiers a long time. They feel alive and powerful as they take on the mountain. However, that feeling can be short-lived, literally, if they don't take suitable precautions. (TS) Skiers must respect the rules of the ski hills and use common sense to ski safely.

5) Start with an anecdote—an incident.

I. Shuddaseenit in Cambridge, Massachusetts, took his neighbor to court because the neighbor hadn't cut his grass in fourteen years. Kay Mart of Madison, Wisconsin, sued her neighbor because the leaves from his tree fell in her yard, and she had to rake them. Perhaps if lines of communication had been open or if each had shown a little more compassion to each other, it wouldn't have gone so far. (TS) Neighbors can be a curse, but establishing a good relationship with them is important.

Almost from the time the downtown No. 4 subway train began its 21-mile run below New York City at 11:38 PM on Tuesday, August 27, something seemed amiss. Heading from the Bronx to Manhattan, the train overshot the platform at a couple of stations. At times it slowed to a crawl and then accelerated to breakneck speeds. The conductor contacted the motorman, Robert Ray, 38, several times on the intercom to find out if everything was all right. Ray replied that he was fine. But that was clearly not the case. It was soon discovered that Ray was being held hostage by gunman. If he'd been allowed to carry a gun himself, neither Ray nor the passengers would have been in any danger. (TS) Subway officials need to implement more safety procedures.

NOTE: You can also make up incidents for your topic. Check with me for effectiveness.

7) Different introductions for the same topic sentence.

And they're off. It's another desperate struggle to beat the bell. Although packrats are rare in Wisconsin, you will find them in every high school, scrounging through their lockers. (TS) The lockers of this species are disasters.

Humor: Newspaper Headline: *High School Evacuated Due to Mysterious Respiratory Illness.* Yes, you should feel guilty. It's not a virus going around. It's the stench from your locker. Particles of God-knows-what are sent into the air every time you open the metal hope chest (you're hoping it will be magically cleaned). Lockers of high school kids can be disaster.

Anecdote: Quincy LaRue had disappeared from school. That night the custodian heard a frantic rapping and muffled yelling. He opened the locker to find Quincy pale, emaciated, and generally annoyed. His parents were at first relieved and then upset at what happened. While looking frantically for an important math assignment, Quince had fallen head-first into the messy locker, passing out as he hit his head on the hooks, and an unsuspecting passerby slammed the door shut. Surprisingly, incidents like this are common. Thousands of high school students' lockers are disasters.

8) Miscellaneous—Kind of makes you wait for the topic.

My father isn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stands 6 feet four inches. Since his height is mostly in his long bony legs, when he sits in a chair, he seems no taller than anyone else, but he still manages to tower over all others in the room. His charisma is legendary.

She says no, but he doesn't have the two-letter word in his vocabulary. In fact, she knows that, so why she doesn't just tie him up and lock him in his room still baffles me. He was lucky this time, though. This time he only broke his ankle. My 9-year-old brother, in some way related to Harry Houdini, definitely has a mind of his own and has escaped with his life on too many occasions.

9) Figures of speech

Pun: Loretta had been working as the tattoo artist's assistant for only two weeks and already he had designs on her. She had no choice, though, to put up with it because a job's a job. Or is it? Some jobs require employees to do tasks that are fit only for Satan.

Hyperbole: The sixth great glacial age descended on the United States last year. Though it rapidly left most other regions, the minds of the students at Harbor High have been frozen solid ever since. (TS) (Allusion) There it is again—the Siren song. When I hear it, no carbohydrate in the house is safe from me: candy, chips, and best of all, chocolate cookie dough. That's what I get for starving myself. (TS) Losing weight is much easier without a stringent diet.

Same Topic, Different Leads

A dog is worth the indigestion. Beads of mustard and ketchup. Heaps of onions and relish tinselled with a shower of sauerkraut. Yes, the stadium hotdog is a work of art.

The garnishes for stadium hot dogs are either crown jewels or a crown of thorns depending on the strength of your stomach.

Double, double, toil and trouble. Your stomach may bubble and toil after a stadium hotdog with the works.

"A dog is man's best friend, at least, if you're talking about stadium hot dogs," said Mary Jordan, concession manager. "Our customers are almost all males."

Others

The absent-minded professor has nothing on Principal Robert Shaw. Shaw drove his new white Oldsmobile Cutlass into his regular parking space Tuesday morning at 7:30 only to discover that the space was covered with fresh tar. Only the day before Shaw himself had warned students not to use this parking lot because of the scheduled resurfacing.

Eight years ago doctors told Janet Cushing's parents that she would most likely not recover from the brain damage she received in a bicycling accident. Saturday the Cushings watched as their daughter walked away as the state champion in extemporaneous speaking.

Tony Adams knows what it means to go to bed hungry and alone. The loneliness in his dark brown eyes tells you he also knows the emptiness of jail life.

Charley Grissom studied family history, underwent plastic surgery, changed his accent, and learned how to play the violin. And he fooled everybody but the FBI.

Herman the squirrel finally lit up the sky in a big way, but don't look for a repeat performance right away. At least not from Herman.

When Freckles the Chimp got out of his cage at Rock Ledge Park Zoo, nobody was too upset. But when he started opening the cages of leopards, bears, snakes, alligators, and dozens of other creatures, it was time to push the panic button.

With a thunderous roar, a rocket rises into the dark carrying a message from earth to some form of intelligent life out in the vast cosmos. A waste of effort? Perhaps, but it stirs the blood to think that we may not be alone. (Boring: For centuries people have wondered about life on other planets.)