



# Introductory Paragraphs

Good news!! You don't have to write your introduction first. After all, you would find it hard to introduce someone at a party if you didn't know something about that person. But, once you are ready to write it, this handout will walk you through the process and provide examples for some of the common essay types you might be asked to write at Meramec.

This handout has four parts:

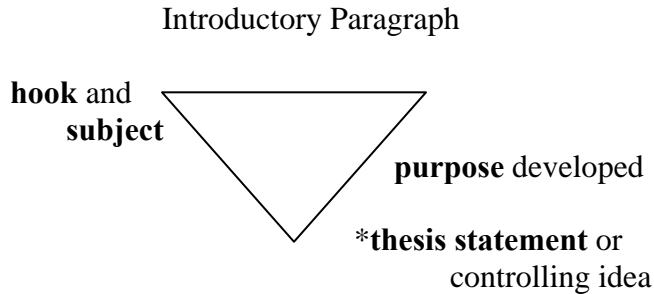
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| Part One:   | THE BASICS<br>This section discusses introductions, effective hooks, development, etc.  |
| Part Two:   | WRITING AN INTRODUCTION: THE PROCESS OUTLINED<br>This section takes you through a process for deciding the best strategies for the hook and development. A sample introduction is included. |
| Part Three: | SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS<br>This section gives some examples of introductions for common types of essay assignments.  |
| Part Four:  | POINTS TO REMEMBER<br>This section gives general reminders.   |

You may go straight to the section that has information you need or read the entire handout for a fuller understanding.

## PART ONE

### THE BASICS

A well-written **introductory paragraph** convinces the reader that your essay is worth reading. An effective introduction begins with a **hook** (a first sentence that captures the reader's attention) and gives the **subject** of the paper. After the hook, the introduction develops the paper's **purpose**. The introduction usually ends with the **thesis statement** (controlling idea). Introductions often begin with a general idea and become more specific, like an inverted triangle.



*\*Handout available for thesis statement*

## What You Need to Know Before You Write Your Introduction

*Remember: an introduction may need to be revised when the body of the paper is closer to its final form.*

You need a general idea of the **focus** (main idea) of your paper in order to introduce the subject. Also, you need to be sure that the introduction's **tone** (your attitude toward the subject) matches that used in the paper. A college-level paper usually has one of three **purposes**: 1) to **inform or explain**; 2) to **persuade or argue**; 3) to **entertain**.

## Strategies for Introductions

Several strategies are used to develop introductions:

- 1) narration
- 2) description
- 3) comparison and contrast
- 4) definition

Depending on the purpose of your paper, some introduction *strategies* will be more effective than others. For example, if your essay tells parents how to discuss avoiding drugs with their children, a brief narrative about your father first trying to talk about drugs might help your readers to connect. However, an amusing anecdote (funny story), another type of narrative, is probably not the best opening. The tone in the introduction would not match the serious tone in the paper.

## Strategies for Effective Hooks

An introduction usually grabs the reader's attention with an effective first sentence, sometimes called a **hook**. Here are some common hooks:

- 1) A provocative question or intriguing statement.
- 2) An interesting line of dialogue or a quotation.

- 3) A vivid image.
- 4) A definition.

The hook used depends largely on the strategy you choose for your introduction, as well as the strategy used to develop the paragraph.

## SAMPLE

One example of an introductory paragraph will put all this together:

**(hook→)** *“Where are you going?” my mother always asked when I was young, and for good reason.* **(development→)** On a family vacation when I was seven years old, my father drove until 2 a.m. to find a campground. We had no idea where we were when we pitched the tent. The next morning, while my parents slept, I went exploring. Climbing over a wire fence, I nearly tumbled into the largest “ditch” I’d ever seen. My parents were in a hurry to leave when I got back to camp, so I didn’t tell them much about my outing. However, when we stopped at a scenic overlook, I got very excited. “That’s the big ditch I told you about!” I yelled. As we walked toward the guard rail, the sign was readable: Grand Canyon. My parents’ frightened glances told me I’d gotten closer to danger than they’d ever imagined. How many parents know what their children are doing all the time? **(thesis statement→)** **Protecting children from danger is not easy for parents.**

## Explanation

In the above example, the writer used a line of dialogue as a hook. It grabs the reader and makes him or her wonder. Did something awful happen to the writer? Why is the writer telling this story?

The introduction then develops with details that explain the situation. In this instance, the strategy is a narrative in time order. The introduction ends with a thesis statement that suggests the paper’s focus: the difficulties parents have protecting children. We expect to learn more about those difficulties in the paper. This introduction works nicely for a paper that informs or explains.

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Papers you will write for Meramec courses will inform/explain or persuade/argue—not entertain—so, let’s look at examples that suit those types of papers. Part Two describes the process of writing an introduction for an observation paper. A sample introduction is included. Additional samples of introductory paragraphs are given for other types of typical assignments.

## PART TWO

### WRITING AN INTRODUCTION: THE PROCESS OUTLINED

#### OBSERVATION PAPER SAMPLE

##### *THE PROCESS*

- 1) *Assignment:* Suppose you are to write a paper in which you observe and then discuss a group of people in a significant way. Since you have a doctor appointment, you jot down notes about the other people waiting. After writing a rough draft, you realize that strangers in a crowded place deal with the situation differently: some people interact with others, while some people tune out others. You decide the paper will explain how these two groups respond in different ways to a crowded place.
- 2) *Hook Options:* Two hooks that might be useful here are 1) an intriguing statement or question: *Did you ever notice that in a crowded situation some people strike up a conversation with anyone, but others seem to curl up inside themselves?* 2) an intriguing description or vivid image: *She hadn't stopped talking for the past 45 minutes as I tried to read my book, and my wait for the doctor was becoming unbearable.*

After reconsidering the rough draft, you realize that you have remained out of the picture as you focused on these two groups, the chatty group and the silent group. You decide that the first hook suits the straightforward, informative tone of the body of the paper. The second hook suggests a personal story and seems less suited to your stance as an observer of the two groups.

- 3) *Paragraph Development and Thesis:* The hook sets up a contrast between the two groups you've identified, so a comparison/contrast strategy is a good way to introduce your paper. The thesis gives your opinion about the subject so that the reader knows what the focus of the paper will be. In the example below, the reader anticipates that she will learn about two different responses people have to crowded environments.

## SAMPLE

(hook→) *Did you ever notice how, in a crowded situation, some people strike up a conversation with anyone, but others seem to curl up inside themselves?* (development→) While waiting at the doctor's office last Thursday, I noticed that most people seemed locked inside themselves, but a few tried to strike up conversations with anyone who would listen. The two groups, the silent and the chatty, have different methods of passing time. The silent ones tuck their heads inside magazines, study the walls or their hands, or even pretend to sleep. The chatty ones stare across the room until they catch someone's eye, ask questions of the receptionist, or make comments to no one in particular. (thesis statement→) **People deal with strangers in crowded situations in two basic ways: by withdrawing or by connecting.**

## Part Three

### SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS

#### *REFLECTION PAPER SAMPLE*

Your assignment is to recall a childhood experience, think about it from the perspective of a mature adult, and to tell its significance. Several hooks would work well here: a brief story, an intriguing statement or question, or a vivid image. You decide to use a vivid image from one of your memories as a hook for this introduction.

## SAMPLE

(hook→) *The new three-speed English Racer gleamed freedom blue in the sunlight.* (development→) My heart skipped a beat. A real, grown-up bicycle! The bicycle seemed so big that I couldn't sit and pedal at the same time. But, it was mine. Even now, I can feel myself leaning in on the frame, standing with one pedal up and one down, coasting down the hills around my house, the wind combing my hair back, the creek three blocks away calling me, the sense of freedom I now had to explore. Wheels! The invention must have propelled more than one first-grader headlong into this big, wonderful, scary world. (thesis statement→) **We think the "first set of wheels" we get means freedom, but this is not always what we experience.**

## EVALUATION PAPER

For this paper, your instructor has asked you to evaluate a popular form of entertainment, such as a new movie or television program, a recent concert or band, or a sporting event. You decide to write about a rock band whose new DVD you like. Since you will be giving your judgment about the quality of the band and supporting that judgment with good reasons, you decide that an intriguing statement may work as a hook.

### SAMPLE

**(hook→)** *I thought all rock bands sounded pretty much the same until I watched the Infernal Machine's new DVD last night.* **(development→)** From the moment the stage lights went on, I knew this band was unique. The special effects, such as the smoke and brightly colored lights, caught my attention before the music started. The first whispering notes of the lead guitar that preceded a full crescendo of drums and bass were enticing. As I watched the DVD, the band's songs took turns and twists in style and sound that were captivating. **(thesis statement→)** **This band's vivid special effects, unique sound, and variety of songs will put their new DVD at the top of the charts very quickly.**

## EXPLAINING CONCEPTS PAPER

The assignment for this paper is to explain an abstract idea, such as justice, trust, love, or sacrifice. Since this assignment is designed to explore the connotations of a word (the emotional meanings of a word, not just the dictionary definition), you will probably relate experiences you've had to the word. You think others might agree with your personal definition, so you decide to use a definition as your hook.

### SAMPLE

**(hook→)** *We often say we have "sacrificed" when we feel we have given up something.* **(development→)** But sacrifice does not necessarily mean "loss." Sacrifice can also mean delaying something in order to gain something else that is worth more than what one gives up. For example, most college students give up time previously spent with friends in order to study. The sacrifice is made for an object greater than momentary pleasure: a degree. The expectation is that the degree will lead to employment opportunities, job satisfaction, and financial security. This kind of sacrifice does not seem so hard when we consider the benefits we'll receive. But some sacrifices are more difficult. What prompts us to make sacrifices that will not benefit us personally? **(thesis→)** **Our moral sense often leads us to make sacrifices that have no apparent benefit, but that satisfy some deep need we have to do what is right.**

## POSITION or ARGUMENT PAPER

Current events often compel us to take sides on issues. In this assignment, you have been asked to defend your position on an issue that involves Meramec students: a proposed smoking ban, a tuition hike, and a proposal to use student activities fees for a new building. You are a non-smoker who supports a smoking ban for the campus. While an intriguing statement, provocative question, and vivid image would all work well, you decide an image to hook the reader.

### SAMPLE

**(hook→)** *Cigarette smoke was thick outside Communications North, and as I passed through the crowd of students puffing away, my eyes began to water, my nostrils burned, and my throat tightened.* **(development→)** I knew I would have to change clothes and take a shower when I got home because the smoke would cling to me the rest of the day. Passing through this smoke several times a week was an irritant I disliked intensely, and I was relieved to learn there was a proposal to ban smoking on campus. The health of non-smokers should not be compromised by smokers who do not seem concerned about their own health. **(thesis→)** **I support a campus-wide smoking ban.**

## Part Four

### POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) Be direct. Avoid using expressions such as “My essay is about. . .” or “In my paper I will explain. . .” These do not entice the reader to continue.
- 2) Be as accurate as possible to avoid alienating readers who have different viewpoints from yours. Some statements need to be qualified: “This information seems to prove that. . .” rather than “This information definitely proves that. . .”
- 3) Use unique and fresh ideas rather than clichés and overworked quotations.
- 4) Be confident about your own opinions and state your ideas clearly. “This law should be enacted because. . .” Don’t apologize for what you write. If you begin with, “I don’t know much about X,” you will not seem credible. Choose subjects you feel comfortable writing about.
- 5) Your introduction should flow smoothly into the body of your paper, with a thesis stating the point of the entire essay.
- 6) The length of your introduction should be in proportion to the length of your paper. A short paper will require a shorter introduction than will a long paper.