



# How to Begin an Essay

Write a beginning that lures in readers and leads to the main idea

Remember **ABC** as a general format for your introduction (**ABCD** for argument):

- A** = **A**ttention-grabbing hook
- B** = **B**ackground information
- C** = **C**lear thesis statement (or **C**laim)
- D** = **D**eclare the opposing viewpoint/**D**on't forget the counterclaim (**ARGUMENT**)

## Begin at the End of your Introduction Paragraph

First, formulate a thesis. It typically appears at the end of your introduction paragraph, but you need to know your main idea before you can come up with a creative way to lure your reader into it. A thesis statement declares the main idea, guides the reader toward your conclusion, and often covers all the main points of your writing. This tells the reader the basic idea, how much you understand this idea, and that you know how to write an essay.

### Examples of Thesis Statements:

- *Several factors should be considered when selecting a pet, including personality, size, and budget.* [Informative]
- *German Shepherds make the best pets.* [Argument – a Debatable Claim]

## Create a “Hook”

The first sentence of an introduction is a writer’s first chance to attract the audience’s attention and make them want to keep reading. We call this a “hook” because it grabs ahold of the reader and doesn’t let go – much like a hook grabs ahold of a fish. There are many methods for writing hooks that inspire a desire to read your essay. Once you write an interesting opening for your introduction, you are ready to guide your reader gradually towards the main point – your thesis. Regardless of which method you choose, the hook must lead into the thesis statement, as in the following example:

Introduction { **Ever felt frozen in front of a writing prompt, fearing failure, not knowing where to begin?** When a student is uncertain how to organize thoughts on the page, tackling a writing prompt can seem daunting. The five-paragraph essay provides a safe and effective format for organizing thoughts into three basic parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. }

← “Hook”

← General information

← Thesis statement

## Types of “Hooks”

### Question

Begin with one or more questions that will be answered by the thesis statement and/or grab the reader’s attention – so long as the answer isn’t too obvious.

### Examples:

- *What would you do if you were stranded in the wilderness? Could you create your own shelter? Find edible food or clean drinking water? Track where you’re going and where you’ve been?* } This hook could reel readers into an informative essay about survival skills or into an argument that urges readers to learn survival skills.
- *How many dogs can be found cruising around town in a patrol car, helping farmers with herding, standing guard beneath a “beware of dog” sign, and snuggling with children on the living room floor? This is all in a day’s work for the loveable, loyal German Shepherd.* } This lead could lure readers into an informative essay about German Shepherds or into an argument that German Shepherds are the best breed of dog.
- *What is the real meaning of kindness?*

### Statistic or Fact

Try to surprise and impress your reader with a startling statistic or unusual fact. If it is a commonly known fact, people won’t be as interested in learning more.

### Examples:

- *A blue whale’s tongue alone can weigh as much as an elephant, and it has a heart the size of a Volkswagen Beetle.* } This hook could reel readers into an informative essay about blue whales or into an argument that urges readers to help save endangered species.
- *Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 deaths among underage youth each year.* } This lead could lure readers into an informative essay about the dangers of driving drunk or into an argument that urges teens not to drink and drive.
- *A cockroach can carry more than forty different pathogens that could spread to humans.*

## Quote

Begin with a quote or familiar expression. Make sure it's relevant to your topic, background information, or thesis. Avoid over-used quotes or clichés; if you must use one, try to put your own original spin on it.

### Examples:

- *“People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn’t true. I was not physically tired, but I was tired of giving in,” said Rosa Parks when asked about her historic act of defiance that changed the face of America forever.*
- *A familiar expression you may have heard before goes: “Out with the old, and in with the new.” Nature demonstrates the truth behind this popular saying each year with the passing of the seasons.*
- *“The most difficult thing is the decision to act; the rest is merely tenacity,” according to Amelia Earhart, the first female aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.*

## Anecdote

Start with a short anecdote (story) or interesting incident. If you have observed or experienced something personally that can demonstrate why the topic interests you, then your reader will likely be interested as well.

### Examples:

- *Imagine being such a good tennis player that you win a school scholarship to play. Imagine dropping out of college to pursue a career in professional tennis. Imagine being this good at one thing, then tackling another career, too. That’s exactly what a young girl named Sally Ride did. Although she started on the road to becoming a tennis pro, Ride soon realized her true calling was in astrophysics, and she went on to become one of today’s most famous women astronauts.*
- *I am Korean-American; but the hyphen often snaps in two, prompting me to act as either a Korean or an American, depending on where I am and who I am with.*
- *Albert Einstein’s parents grew concerned because he did not begin to talk when other kids his age did. One day, during supper, the young genius announced: “The soup is too hot!” Surprised, his parents asked why he had kept silent up until then, to which he replied, “Because up to now, everything was in order.”*

## Tension

Open with a powerful statement that supports your thesis or a bold opinion you intend to challenge. If you can challenge the reader’s understanding of the world without alienating his beliefs or values, you are likely to get his attention quickly.

### Examples:

- *Americans cling to three myths about their country.*
- *Some may say writing is something only those with a born talent will ever do well.*

## Description

Start with sensory details. Setting and character description are a creative way to lure your reader into a five-paragraph essay, as can starting with sound effects or onomatopoeia.

### Examples:

- *Sparky may have appeared unpredictable to the untrained eye, but anyone who knew much about dogs would have recognized the fluffy, white Labradoodle sitting at attention with her floppy ears perked up on either side of her head to be the perfect pet. Canines make amazing companions, but choosing the right kind is important.*
- *Lush green grass carpeted the learning environment. Sounds of birds chirping and a fountain flowing from the fish pond filled the air. This is where I discovered my love for science – the outdoor classroom.*
- *Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom. My heart raced. For years, I had trained for this moment.*

## Reflection

Beginning with a brief overview of a personal experience and/or its impact on you can be a powerful attention-grabber.

### Examples:

- *I learned more over the years in the locker room than in the classroom. As an African-American male who played football, it was expected that I would do the bare minimum in class but shine on the field. I felt embarrassed in the classroom. My knees couldn’t even fit under the desk, and my body didn’t belong there. On the field, however, I came to life. In fact, I’ve come to realize that football is the answer to most of life’s mysteries.*
- *When I think back on the many teachers I have encountered over the years, one characteristic stands out above all others. It is the yardstick by which I measure how fondly I remember a teacher and the degree to which she impacted me personally. Of course, how well she knows her subject and how well she instructs her students in are of utmost importance. Nevertheless, the true measure of a great teacher is how much she seems to care.*