



Illinois Valley Community College

Writing Center

WRITING AN ESSAY INTRODUCTION

The “Attention-Getter”

Every formal essay introduction should start with an *attention-getter*. There are several different types of attention getters and their purpose is to gain the interest of the reader.

The following are examples of attention-getters to begin an introduction:

- **Quotation-** Start with a relevant quotation from the primary text or a secondary source.

Example: **The French poet, Marie de France, once said of the state of women, “You have to endure what one can’t change.”** However, characters from Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Elisabeth Phelps’s *The Story of Avis* would challenge this thought.

- **Definition-** Start with the definition of a word that is relevant to the focus and thesis of the essay. However, do not define commonly used words; the word should be intriguing or surprising to the reader.

Example: **Webster’s dictionary defines “duality” as the quality or condition of being two or twofold.** In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “The Minister’s Black Veil,” there is a strong symbol of duality. The knowledge of the reader is different from the knowledge of the community in the story, exemplifying the duality theme.

- **Interesting fact-** Start with a fact that is relevant to the thesis and focus of the paper.

Example: **It is not a surprising statistic that 70 percent of Americans favor ending the Electoral College (Kadransky).** With the winner-take-all system of the Electoral College, it is understandable how so many individuals can feel like their votes do not have any substance in the presidential general election.

- **Rhetorical question-** Start with a rhetorical question that you do not necessarily answer in the paper. The goal is to stimulate the reader to think about the question.

Example: **How can a country that puts so much moral significance and importance on the idea of freedom and liberty for all citizens have kept a significant amount of the population in perpetual bondage and slavery for so many years?** It is a question that has no one specific answer. In colonial America, between 1619 and 1776, black slavery was endemic and grew even stronger because of institutions like the Trans-Atlantic slave route and the agricultural economy of the southern colonies.

Transition to the Topic/Thesis Statement

The purpose of the introductory paragraph goes beyond simply gaining the attention of the reader. You should also be sure to transition to your main topic and thesis statement in this paragraph. The goal should be to smoothly guide your readers from the attention getter to the actual focus of your essay. Using transitional words, phrases, or even entire sentences can help achieve this goal. It is important that the reader see how the attention getter and topic of the paper are related. If you are writing about a specific text, refer to the full title and author's full name in the transition. See the example below:

Attention-getter

*Is it ever acceptable to abandon a family member? Numerous situations may lead people to consider fleeing their own relatives, and many people struggle with this difficult decision. Initially, it may seem cruel to leave relatives forever. **However**, in James Joyce's short story "Eveline," the reader is left with the impression that Eveline should have chosen to depart from her abusive father. This decision, though, would have required strength and confidence that Eveline does not have; years of living with abuse have eroded her resolve. Instead of escaping, she decides to keep her pledge to her mother and stay with her cruel father. Eveline's decision to stay with her father reflects the character's weakness, vulnerability, and insecurity.*

Transition including the title and author

Thesis statement

In this example, the thesis of the essay is that Eveline's character is weak, vulnerable, and insecure. The attention getter snags the audience's interest, and the transitional word and sentence guide the reader to the main topic and text of the essay. The attention-getter and the thesis statement are clearly related, and the transition helps bridge the gap between the two.