

Introduction Paragraph

Introduction paragraphs should:

- 1) Engage your reader
 - a. Explain how the opening sentence is connected to the topic of your paper
- 2) Provide background information
 - a. Transition into the specific argument/thesis
- 3) State your thesis

Part 1: Engage Your Reader

When writers try to hook their readers, they often use one of the following techniques:

- 1) historical review
- 2) anecdote
- 3) surprising statement
- 4) famous person
- 5) declarative statement

What follows is an explanation of each of these patterns with examples from real magazine articles to illustrate the explanations.

Historical Review: Some topics are better understood if a brief historical review of the topic is presented to lead into the discussion of the moment. Such topics might include "a biographical sketch of a war hero," "an upcoming execution of a convicted criminal," or "drugs and the younger generation." Obviously there are many, many more topics that could be introduced by reviewing the history of the topic before the writer gets down to the nitty gritty of his paper. It is important that the historical review be brief so that it does not take over the paper.

Anecdote: An anecdote is a little story. Everyone loves to listen to stories. Begin a paper by relating a small story that leads into the topic of your paper. Your story should be a small episode, not a full blown story with characters and plot and setting. Read some of the anecdotes in the *Reader's Digest* special sections such as "Life in These United States" to learn how to tell small but potent stories. If you do it right, your story will capture the reader's interest so that he or she will continue to read your paper. One caution: be sure that your story does not take over the paper. Remember, it is an introduction, not the paper.

Surprising Statement: A surprising statement is a favorite introductory technique of professional writers. There are many ways a statement can surprise a reader. Sometimes the statement is surprising because it is disgusting. Sometimes it is joyful. Sometimes it is shocking. Sometimes it is surprising because of who said it. Sometimes it is surprising because it includes profanity. Professional writers have honed this technique to a fine edge. It is not used as much as the first two patterns, but it is used.

Famous Person: People like to know what celebrities say and do. Dropping the name of a famous person at the beginning of a paper usually gets the reader's attention. It may be something that person said or something he or she did that can be presented as an interest grabber. You may just mention the famous person's name to get the reader's interest. Of course, bringing up this person's name must be relevant to the topic. Even though the statement or action may not be readily relevant, a clever writer can convince the reader that it is relevant.

Declarative Statement: This technique is quite commonly used, but it must be carefully used or the writer defeats his whole purpose of using one of these patterns, to get the reader's interest. In this pattern, the writer simply states straight out what the topic of his paper is going to be about. It is the technique that most student writers use with only modest success most of the time, but good professional writers use it too.

Try using two or three different patterns for your introductory paragraph and see which introductory paragraph is best; it's often a delicate matter of tone and of knowing who your audience is. =

Identify the Types of Engaging Openings

Example 1: The most widely read writer in America today is not Stephen King, Michael Chrichton, or John Grisham. It's Margaret Milner Richardson, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, whose name appears on the "1040 Forms and Instructions" booklet. I doubt that Margaret wrote the entire 1040 pamphlet, but the annual introductory letter, "A Note from the Commissioner," bears her signature.

[\[about the lady named above\]](#)

Example 2: The victory brought pure elation and joy. It was May 1954, just days after the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. At NAACP headquarters in New York the mood was euphoric. Telegrams of congratulations poured in from around the world; reporters and well-wishers crowded the halls.

[\[this article discusses school segregation in the present time\]](#)

Example 3: Have a minute? Good. Because that may be all it takes to save the life of a child—your child. Accidents kill nearly 8000 children under age 15 each year. And for every fatality, 42 more children are admitted to hospitals for treatment. Yet such deaths and injuries can be avoided through these easy steps parents can take right now. You don't have a minute to lose.

[\[lists seven easy actions a person can take to help guard a child against accidents\]](#)

Example 4: In the College of Veterinary Medicine and Engineering, for example, nearly one-third of the teaching faculty may retire by the year 2004. In the College of Education, more than a third of the professors are 55 years old and older. The largest turnover for a single department is projected to be in geology. More than half of its faculty this year are in the age group that will retire at the millennium, says Ron Downey of K-State's Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. The graying of K-State's faculty is not unique. A Regents' report shows approximately 27 percent of the faculty at the six state universities will retire by the end of this decade, creating a shortage of senior faculty.

[\[about the aging of the faculty of Kansas State University\]](#)

Example 5: Mike Cantlon remembers coming across his first auction ten years ago while cruising the back roads of Wisconsin. He parked his car and wandered into the crowd, toward the auctioneer's singsong chant and wafting smell of barbecued sandwiches. Hours later, Cantlon emerged lugging a \$22 beam drill-for constructing post-and-beam barns—and a passion for auctions that has clung like a cocklebur on an old saddle blanket. "It's an addiction," says Cantlon, a financial planner and one of the growing number of auction fanatics for whom Saturdays will never be the same.

[\[the author explains what auctions are, how to spot bargains in auctions, what to protect yourself from at auctions, and other facts about auctions and the people who go to them\]](#)

Fitzgerald Intro Paragraph Example

The Roaring Twenties, or the Jazz Age, a term coined by Fitzgerald, was a period of enormous social change in America, especially in the area of women's rights. Before World War I, American women did not enjoy universal suffrage, but two years after the end of the war, they were finally given the vote, fashion changed, dances became more wild and sexual, and women engaged in smoking and drinking, often in the company of men and without chaperones. In other words, as often seen during times of social change, a "New Woman" emerged in the 1920s (Bode). And, again as usual, her appearance on the scene evoked a good deal of negative reaction from conservative members of society, both male and female, who felt, as they generally did at these times, that women's rejection of any aspect of their traditional role inevitably would result in the destruction of the family and the moral decline of society as a whole. These social fears and biases toward the new era for women are reflected in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. In spite of numerous differences of female characters, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, are all versions of the "New Woman." Fitzgerald exposes the plight of the new woman in 1920s America – social expectations of the 1920s trapped women in unhealthy and unsatisfying relationships while their independence from relationships made them appear less attractive and elicited unsympathetic responses.

Fitzgerald Conclusion Paragraph

Although Fitzgerald exposes the powerlessness of women through their relationships with the men in their lives, he fails to empower his only independent female character – instead he depicts her as unattractive and cold. This depiction of men and women proves problematic for 1920s readers, who may already view the new women of the 1920s with trepidation. The new independent woman, Jordan, is not merely a woman with a job who can support herself, but her independence is based on immorality: lying and cheating, as though women could not achieve this independence through just means. The social ladder climber, Myrtle, emotionally abuses her husband and secretly tries to leave him, ultimately destroying her marriage and her husband. Even Daisy, the stereotypical "damsel in distress" publically challenges her husband, devalues her relationship with her daughter, and engages in an affair with another man, subconsciously telling readers that even more traditional women are changing and rejecting past social morals. Each of these women challenge society's values with their irresponsibility and detachment, destroying the men in their lives. And, whether these negative depictions were intentional or not, Fitzgerald's fears toward the new 1920s women flowed through his writing, warning others of the immorality and danger of these social changes and unintentionally biasing future generations.