

Introductory Techniques

Beginnings are everything

Compiled by Jon Ummel and Vince DeMiero

There are many ways to begin an essay. We begin in ways that are familiar to the reader, but not too overly familiar. Variety and familiarity, this is what we expect in all of our writing; especially in the way we write introductions.

The suggestions listed below are “tried and true.” *They work*. And they also are infinitely expandable because they are not determined by content. Instead, they are techniques. So, use one of these approaches, but use your own content. If you don’t believe that these techniques work, examine an essay that you like and see if the writer uses one of the techniques listed below. And if the writer doesn’t, what technique is being used? If it’s good, let us know and we’ll add it to the list.

- 1) **Tell a story.** Begin your essay with a short story. Everyone loves a story. Once upon a time...
- 2) **Open with a question.** A question demands an answer. It matters little what the question is, if you ask it, the person you ask will try to answer. In writing, it is the reader who will try, and by making that attempt the reader has entered into your writing. Now you have to keep the reader interested.
- 3) **Use a quotation.** A quotation is usually a good beginning because you have chosen the quoted material because it is important to your story; therefore, the reader will also probably find it important. The reader may also recognize the quote and feel comfortable about it, sharing some of your insight. This is why politicians use quotes all of the time in their speeches.
- 4) **Use an outrageous statement.** The reader will probably not agree with the statement, but at least you have gotten the reader’s attention. After that you can qualify your statement.
- 5) **Use facts.** There is something about facts that appeal to most readers. We live in an “Information Age.” If the facts are especially startling, then you have an even stronger grip on the reader’s attention.
- 6) **State your main point – your thesis.** Sometimes it is best to just come right out with what you’re trying to say. Most people admire directness.
- 7) **Use an anecdote,** even if you don’t agree with it, it gives you a context from which to start your essay and share your perspective.
- 8) **Begin with a dramatic scene.** Conflict always gets a reader’s attention.
- 9) **Begin with a descriptive scene.** Paint a vivid picture. Use strong sensory information.
- 10) **Start with dialogue.** This is usually a type of a dramatic scene, but it often has more impact because you have real voices in your paper. And real voice almost always gets the reader’s attention.