

1 Opening an essay

Most of your essays will open with a paragraph that draws readers from their world into your world. A good opening paragraph usually satisfies several requirements:

- It focuses readers' attention on your subject and arouses their curiosity about what you have to say.
- It specifies what your topic is and implies your attitude.
- Often it provides your thesis statement.
- It is concise and sincere.

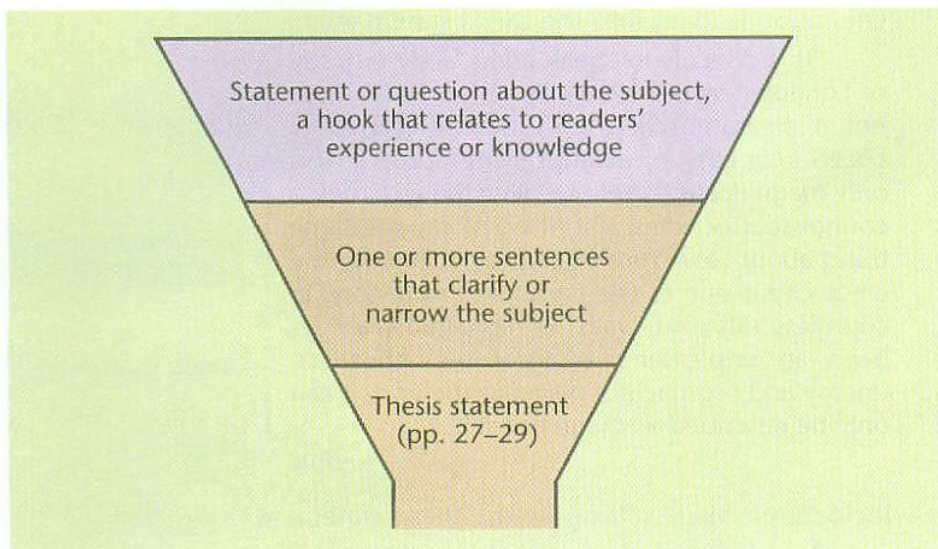
Some strategies for opening paragraphs

- Ask a question.
- Relate an incident.
- Use a vivid quotation.
- Offer a surprising statistic or other fact.
- State an opinion related to your thesis.
- Outline the argument your thesis refutes.
- Provide background.
- Create a visual image that represents your subject.
- Make a historical comparison or contrast.
- Outline a problem or dilemma.
- Define a word central to your subject.
- In some business or technical writing, summarize your paper.

■ The funnel introduction

One reliably effective introduction forms a kind of funnel:

Funnel introduction



Here are two examples of the funnel introduction:

Can your home or office computer make you sterile? Can it strike you blind or dumb? The answer is: probably not. Nevertheless, reports of side effects relating to computer use should be examined, especially in the area of birth defects, eye complaints, and postural difficulties.

Questions about subject

Clarification of subject: bridge to thesis statement

Although little conclusive evidence exists to establish a causal link between computer use and problems of this sort, the circumstantial evidence can be disturbing.

—Thomas Hartmann, “How Dangerous Is Your Computer?”

Thesis statement

The Declaration of Independence is so widely regarded as a statement of American ideals that its origins in practical politics tend to be forgotten. Thomas Jefferson’s draft was intensely debated and then revised in the Continental Congress. Jefferson was disappointed with the result. However, a close reading of both the historical context and the revisions themselves indicates that the Congress improved the document for its intended purpose.

—Ann Weiss (student), “The Editing of the Declaration of Independence”

Statement about subject

Clarification of subject: bridge to thesis statement

Thesis statement

■ Other effective introductions

Several other types of introduction can be equally effective, though they are sometimes harder to invent and control.

Quotation leading into the thesis statement

“It is difficult to speak adequately or justly of London,” wrote Henry James in 1881. “It is not a pleasant place; it is not agreeable, or cheerful, or easy, or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent.” Were he alive today, James, a connoisseur of cities, might easily say the same thing about New York or Paris or Tokyo, for the great city is one of the paradoxes of history. In countless different ways, it has almost always been an unpleasant, disagreeable, cheerless, uneasy and reproachful place; in the end, it can only be described as magnificent.

—*Time*

Quotation

Bridge to thesis statement

Thesis statement

Incident or image setting up the thesis statement

Canada is pink. I knew that from the map I owned when I was six. On it, New York was green and brown, which was true as far as I could see, so there was no reason to distrust the map maker’s portrayal of Canada. When my parents took me across the border and we entered the immigration booth, I looked excitedly for the pink earth. Slowly it dawned on me: this foreign, “different” place was not so different.

Incident from writer’s experience

I discovered that the world in my head and the world at my feet were not the same.

—Robert Ornstein, *Human Nature*

Thesis statement

Startling opinion or question

Caesar was right. Thin people need watching. I've been watching them for most of my adult life, and I don't like what I see. When these narrow fellows spring at me, I quiver to my toes. Thin people come in all personalities, most of them menacing. You've got your "together" thin person, your mechanical thin person, your condescending thin person, your tsk-tsk thin person. All of them are dangerous.

—Suzanne Britt,
"That Lean and Hungry Look"

Opinion

Thesis statement

Background, such as a historical comparison

Throughout the first half of this century, the American Medical Association, the largest and most powerful medical organization in the world, battled relentlessly to rid the country of quack potions and cure-alls; and it is the AMA that is generally credited with being the single most powerful force behind the enactment of the early pure food and drug laws. Today, however, medicine's guardian seems to have done a complete about-face and become one of the pharmaceutical industry's staunchest allies—often at the public's peril and expense.

—Mac Jeffery, "Does Rx Spell Rip-off?"

Historical background

Thesis statement

■ Ineffective introductions

When writing and revising an introductory paragraph, avoid the following approaches that are likely to bore readers or make them question your sincerity or control:

Openings to avoid

- **A vague generality or truth.** Don't extend your reach too wide with a line such as *Throughout human history . . .* or *In today's world. . .*. Readers can do without the warm-up.

(continued)

- **A flat announcement.** Don't start with *The purpose of this essay is . . .*, *In this essay I will . . .*, or any similar presentation of your intention or topic.
- **A reference to the essay's title.** Don't refer to the title of the essay in the first sentence—for example, *This is a big problem* or *This book is about the history of the guitar*.
- **According to Webster. . .** Don't start by citing a dictionary definition. A definition can be an effective springboard to an essay, but this kind of lead-in has become dull with overuse.
- **An apology.** Don't fault your opinion or your knowledge with *I'm not sure if I'm right, but . . .*; *I don't know much about this, but . . .*; or a similar line.

2 Closing an essay

Most of your compositions will end with a closing statement or conclusion, a signal to readers that you have not simply stopped writing but have actually finished. The conclusion completes an essay, bringing it to a climax while assuring readers that they have understood your intention.

Effective conclusions

An essay conclusion may consist of a single sentence or a group of sentences, usually set off in a separate paragraph. The conclusion may take one or more of the following approaches:

Some strategies for closing paragraphs

- Recommend a course of action.
- Summarize the paper.
- Echo the approach of the introduction.
- Restate your thesis and reflect on its implications.
- Strike a note of hope or despair.
- Give a symbolic or powerful fact or other detail.
- Give an especially compelling example.
- Create an image that represents your subject.
- Use a quotation.

The following paragraph concludes the essay on the Declaration of Independence (the introduction appears on p. 104):

The Declaration of Independence has come to be a statement of this nation's political philosophy, but that was not its purpose in 1776. Jefferson's passionate expression had to bow to the goals of the Congress as a whole to forge unity among the colonies and to win the support of foreign nations.

—Ann Weiss (student), "The Editing of the Declaration of Independence"

Echo of introduction: contrast between past and present

Restatement and elaboration of thesis

Maxine Hong Kingston uses a different technique—a vivid image—to conclude an essay about an aunt who committed suicide by drowning:

My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origami-ed into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute.

—Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman"

Summary

Image

In the next paragraph the author concludes an essay on environmental protection with a call for action:

Until we get the answers, I think we had better keep on building power plants and growing food with the help of fertilizers and such insect-controlling chemicals as we now have. The risks are well known, thanks to the environmentalists. If they had not created a widespread public awareness of the ecological crisis, we wouldn't stand a chance. But such awareness by itself is not enough. Flaming manifestos and prophecies of doom are no longer much help, and a search for scapegoats can only make matters worse. The time for sensations and manifestos is about over. Now we need rigorous analysis, united effort and very hard work.

—Peter F. Drucker, "How Best to Protect the Environment"

Summary and opinion

Call for action

■ Ineffective conclusions

The preceding examples illustrate ways of avoiding several pitfalls of conclusions:

Closings to avoid

- **A repeat of the introduction.** Don't simply replay your introduction. The conclusion should capture what the paragraphs of the body have added to the introduction.
- **A new direction.** Don't introduce a subject different from the one your essay has been about. If you arrive at a new idea, this may be a signal to start fresh with that idea as your thesis.
- **A sweeping generalization.** Don't conclude more than you reasonably can from the evidence you have presented. If your essay is about your frustrating experience trying to clear a parking ticket, you cannot reasonably conclude that *all* local police forces are tied up in red tape.
- **An apology.** Don't cast doubt on your essay. Don't say, *Even though I'm no expert* or *This may not be convincing, but I believe it's true* or anything similar. Rather, to win your readers' confidence, display confidence.

Exercise: Analyze the introductory and concluding paragraphs in the following first and final drafts of a student essay. What is wrong with the first-draft paragraphs? Why are the final-draft paragraphs better? Could they be improved still further?

Title?

In "Welcome to Cyberbia," written in 1995, M. Kadi predicts that the Internet will lead to more fragmentation in society because people just seek out others like themselves. But Kadi fails to foresee how the unique anonymity of Internet communication could actually build diversity into community by lowering the barriers of physical appearance.

Anonymity on the Internet. It's one of the best things about technology. Most people who communicate online use an invented screen name to avoid revealing personal details such as age, gender, and ethnic background. No one knows whether you're fat or thin or neat or sloppy. What kind of clothes you wear. (Maybe you're not wearing clothes at all). People who know you personally don't even know who you are with an invented screen name.

We can make ourselves known without first being prejudged because of our physical attributes. For example, I participate in a snowboarding forum that has mostly men. I didn't realize what I was getting into when I used my full name as my screen name. Before long, I had received unfriendly responses such as "What does a girl know?" and "Why don't you go back to knitting?" I guess I had run into a male prejudice against female snowboarders. However, another woman on the forum had no such problems. At first she signed on with a screen name that did not reveal her gender, and no one responded negatively to her messages. When she had contributed for a while, she earned respect from the other snowboarders. When she revealed that she was a woman at that point, no one responded negatively in the way I had experienced. She posed at first as someone different from who she really was and could make herself heard.

We also cannot prejudice others because of their appearance. Often in face-to-face interaction we assume we know things about people just because of the way they look. Assumptions prevent people from discovering their shared interests and concerns, and this is particularly true where race is concerned. The anonymity of the Internet makes physical barriers irrelevant, and only people's minds meet. Because of this, the Internet could create a world free of physical bias.

Logged on to the Internet we can become more tolerant of others. We can become a community.

Sara Ling
 Professor Nelson
 English 120A
 4 November 2005

The Internet:
 Fragmentation or Community?

We hear all sorts of predictions about how the Internet will enrich our individual lives and promote communication, tolerance, and thus community in our society. But are these promises realistic? In her 1995 essay "Welcome to Cyberbia," M. Kadi argues that they are not. Instead, she predicts that the Internet will lead to more fragmentation, not community, because users merely seek out others with the same biases, concerns, and needs as their own. The point is an interesting one, but Kadi fails to foresee that the unique anonymity of Internet communication could actually build diversity into community by lowering the barriers of physical appearance.

Descriptive title

Introduction

Question to be addressed

Summary of Kadi's essay

Thesis statement

Explanation of Internet's anonymity

Internet communication can be anonymous on at least two levels. The people we communicate with do not know our age, whether we're fat or thin or neat or sloppy, what kind of clothes we wear (if we're wearing clothes at all), or anything else about physical appearance. If we use invented screen names instead of our real names, readers don't even know whatever our names may reveal or suggest about us, such as gender or ethnic background.

Presentation of survey conducted to gauge use of invented screen names

Internet anonymity seems a popular option, judging by the numbers of invented user names seen in online forums. To determine the extent of invented user names as well as the reasons for them, I surveyed seventy-eight students. I asked two questions: (1) Do you ever write with an invented user name when contributing to chat rooms, newsgroups, Web logs, and so on? (2) If yes, why do you use an invented name: to protect your privacy, to avoid revealing personal information, or for some other reason? The results are shown in fig. 1. A large majority of the students (seventy-eight percent) do use invented names online. And most of them do so to protect their privacy (thirty-seven percent) or to avoid revealing personal details (thirty percent).

Explanation of survey method

Summary of survey results

Graph displaying survey results, with self-explanatory labels and caption

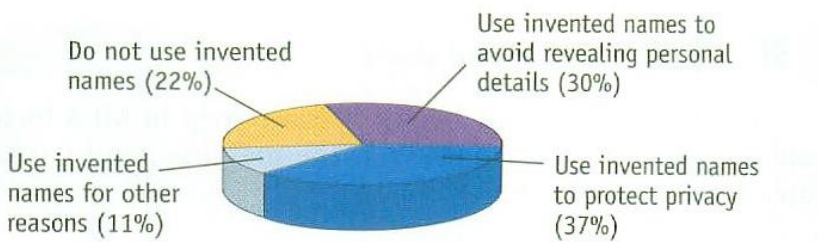


Fig. 1. Use of invented screen names among seventy-eight Internet users.

First main point: We are not prejudged by others.

Users of the Internet clearly value the anonymity it can give them. This anonymity allows users to communicate freely without being prejudged because of physical attributes. In follow-up interviews, twenty students said that they use invented names to mask personal details because they think the details might work against them in online communication. One said she is able to participate in a physics discussion list without fear of being ignored by the group's professional physicists. Another said he thinks he can contribute more freely to a political forum because no one knows he's African American. I learned the benefits of anonymity myself when I joined a snowboarding forum using my full name and received hostile responses such as "What does a girl know?" and "Why don't you go back to

Examples of first point

knitting?" I assumed I had run into a male prejudice against female snowboarders. However, another woman on the forum had no such problems when she contributed for a while before revealing her gender.

Granted, concealing or altering identities on the Internet can be a problem, as when adults pose as children to seduce or harm them. These well-publicized occurrences say much about the need to monitor children's use of the Internet and to be cautious about meeting Internet corre-

Qualification of first point

spondents. However, they do not undermine the value of being able to make ourselves heard in situations where normally (in the real world) we would be shut out.

Conclusion of first point

The Internet's anonymity has a flip side, too: just as we cannot be prejudged, so we cannot prejudge others because of their appearance. Often in face-to-face interaction, we assume we know things about people just because of the way they look. Someone with an athletic build must be unintelligent. Someone who is heavy must be uninteresting. Perhaps most significant, someone of another race must have fixed and contrary views about all kinds of issues, from family values to crime to affirmative action. Assumptions like these prevent us from discovering the interests and concerns we share with people who merely look different. But with the anonymity of the Internet, such physical barriers to understanding are irrelevant.

Second main point: We cannot prejudge others.

Clarification of second point

Examples of second point

Effects of assumptions

Conclusion of second point

A world without physical bias may be an unreachable ideal. However, the more we communicate with just our minds, the more likely it is that our minds will find common ground and put less emphasis on physical characteristics. Logged on, we can begin to become more accepted and more accepting, more tolerated and more tolerant. We can begin to become a community.

Conclusion, summarizing essay

Work Cited

Kadi, M. "Welcome to Cyberbia." Utne Reader Mar.-Apr. 1995: 57-59.

Work cited in MLA style (see p. 656)

Exercise:

Read extracts 1 and 2 from the introductions to two different students essays related to consumption. For each extract, decide on the purpose of the essay, **A** or **B**.

1. *Consumers behave very differently from a generational perspective. In particular, older consumers differ greatly from the younger generations, who are less loyal to particular brands and more suspicious of advertising messages.*

 - A.** To argue that the older generation are the most important consumers
 - B.** To show the similarities and differences in consumer behavior
2. *If the whole world consumed at the same rate as the USA, four planets would be needed to maintain the world's current population. People need to evaluate their current consumption patterns if the world is to have a sustainable future.*

- A. To compare American consumption patterns with others in the world
- B. To look at the problem of consumption rates and the need for change

Linking paragraphs in the essay

- Make sure each paragraph contributes to your thesis
- Arrange the paragraphs in a clear, logical order
- Create links between paragraphs – repetition, restatement, transitional expressions/sentences

The following passage from an essay illustrates the third technique, with **circled** repetitions and restatements, **boxed** transitional expressions, and transitional sentences noted in annotations.

Introduction establishing subject and stating thesis	A hyperactive committee member can contribute to efficiency. A hyperactive salesperson can contribute to profits. When children are hyperactive, though, people—even parents—may wish they had never been born. A
Thesis statement	collage of those who must cope with hyperactivity in children is a picture of frustration, anger, and loss.
Transitional topic sentence relating to thesis statement	The first part of the collage is the doctors . In their terminology, the word hyperactivity has been replaced by ADHD , attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. They apply the term to children who are abnormally or excessively busy. . . .
Transitional topic sentence relating to thesis statement	As the mother of an ADHD child , I can say what the disorder means to the parents who form the second part of the collage
Transitional sentence	The weight of ADHD , however , does not rest on the
Topic sentence relating to thesis statement	doctors and parents . The darkest part of the collage belongs to the children
Transitional sentence into conclusion, restating thesis statement	The collage is complete, and it is dark and somber. ADHD , as applied to children , is a term with uncertain, unattractive, and bitter associations. The picture does have one bright spot, however , for inside every ADHD child is a lovely, trusting, calm person waiting to be recognized.