Introductory Strategies

Explanation:

As a student writer, you probably have been informed that an introduction should state the main idea of the essay through the thesis and capture the reader’s attention. Yet, many introductions are only skeletons, consisting of one sentence, the thesis. This brevity might be the product of uncertainty about how to interest a reader. One way of capturing the reader’s attention is to pitch your appeal to the particular audience that you’re writing for. Are you writing for the other students, the teacher, or for a general audience, such as the readers of the Detroit Free Press?

To flesh out an introduction, you can employ a variety of strategies. The most common approach is often designated as the funnel approach because it begins with a general comment and then leads into the thesis. To be effective, the funnel approach must begin with a general comment that both relates to the thesis and is relevant to the audience. Compare the following two instructions:

A. Education has existed since the beginning of time. There are good and bad aspects to school. I like my psychology instructor at Henry Ford Community College.

B. The success of an education is often determined by the quality of instruction provided. My educational experience has shown that a teacher is more valuable than new textbooks or an up-to-date classroom. Nowhere is this more evident than in my college education. My instructor at Henry Ford Community College has not only taught me much about the field of psychology, but he has also prepared me effectively for life.

Selection B provides a better introduction because it begins with an opening comment relevant to a student audience and because the other sentences funnel into the thesis. Each sentence seems to follow clearly from the previous one.

There are other strategies that can be used to create a good introduction; some are a variation on the funnel pattern. The following are popular examples of introductory techniques:

a) a well chosen quotation
b) a controversial statement

c) a question that relates to the thesis

d) a story or an incident that relates to the thesis

e) a definition of an important word

f) a startling or relevant statistic

g) a statement that presents a popular opinion that is contradicted or shown to be untrue by the thesis.

h) a comparison or analogy

Another useful method of introducing your thesis is to find and underline key nouns that occur in the thesis. Take a noun and build the first sentence of the introductory paragraph around it and then add one or two sentences which lead to the thesis. In the following sample paragraphs, the key nouns would be the words “reading” and “habit”.

A. Reading is one of the activities that one engages in on a regular basis each day, every day. It fills the minutes and hours as nothing else can. One does it to satisfy the requirements of class, to gather information, or to gain the pleasure that only reading can deliver. Reading is undoubtedly a very valuable habit.

B. At one time or another the individual is confronted by a habit that can prove to be quite troublesome. For example, he might find himself tied continually to the end of a cigarette filling the air and his lungs with lethal clouds of smoke. However, not all habits are detrimental to one’s health. In fact, certain habits can be very beneficial. Reading is undoubtedly a very valuable habit.

As you can see, this approach won’t necessarily get the writer an invitation to write for the New Yorker magazine; however, it is a workable way to introduce your topic.

To write a good introduction, you must also know the types of introductions to avoid. Never create an introduction that relies on one of the following approaches:

a) the traffic-cop approach directly states the writers intentions and uses phrases, such as “In this paper I will discuss…”

b) the apology that notes the writer’s lack of experience with the topic.

c) the irrelevant historical approach that uses expressions such as “From the beginning of time.”

d) the cliché opening that uses common or hackneyed comparison, such as “love and marriage are like a horse and carriage.”
e) a definition that states the obvious

Exercises

To provide more practice in recognizing effective introductions, you should match the following instructions with the appropriate thesis, placing the letter of the right thesis method in the blank. Then you should identify the introduction strategy used; refer to the list above in naming the technique used. Some examples are incorrect. Note the improper technique with an “X”.

Here are the sample theses:

A. The father terrorized and controlled his family with brute force.
B. Thus, the best way to court inspiration is to plunge into the process of writing.
C. Since many Americans are impoverished by unexpected medical expenses, the federal government should provide national health insurance for all its citizens.
D. I know I wanted to meet her because we seemed to share similar tastes and outlooks.
E. In the 1980’s phobias are a metaphor for the human condition, a frame of reference for viewing a whole landscape of human emotion and behavior.
F. The purpose of college is to get a good education to obtain a high-paying job.
G. It is important to know how to recover quickly from a shattered love relationship.
H. Handgun laws would save many lives.
I. the poem displays both meanings of lying.
J. Thorton, Arkansas, with a total population of 746, is a perfect example of a decaying Southern town.
K. In a world increasingly defined by the selfish motive and the insensitive gesture, these children’s actions are a refreshing counterpoint, and even suggest that comparison displayed so early in life must be innate.

Example: If you were in an unfortunate car accident and needed to be hospitalized for several weeks, would you be able to afford thousands of dollars for proper medical care? Unfortunately, an increasing number of unemployed Americans cannot pay for unexpected medical expenses.

Thesis: C Technique: Question
1. I can remember when I first saw her in Mr. Sagan’s French class. Her bright orange hair and black leather pants caught my attention. Everybody else seemed to fit into some stereotype of the high school student, but she was aloof and strong. She sat there alone, yet without any anxiety about being alone.

2. The poem I have been asked to analyze is about lying. What is lying? According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, to lie is “1: to make an untrue statement with intent to deceive; 2: to create a false or misleading impression.”

3. The young mother sobs at the bad news she reads in a telegram and her toddler, playing nearby, senses something is wrong. He runs back and forth in obvious concern and then resolutely picks up a toy and offers it to her. An 18-month-old, hearing a baby cry, trots over and tries to give it a cookie, but the baby still wails. The child whimpers in sympathy, strokes the infant’s head and finally brings over his own mother and places her hand on the baby’s brow.

4. Walking into my friend’s living room was like walking into a lion’s den. His father paced back and forth as he roared his disapproval of his cub’s actions. His roaring was interrupted only when his wife warily edged into the small, confined room, quickly depositing his supper on a nearby table. But she wasn’t quick enough to escape the swipe of his large paw. Then he gnawed at the roast beef and lapped up a nearby Coke, glaring at the frightened bystander.

5. Many students who claim that they are waiting for the winds of inspiration often hand in late assignments. These procrastinators are obviously not aware of L’Engle’s comment that “inspiration usually comes during work, rather than before it.”

6. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one adult in twenty suffers from the most serious variety of phobia, agoraphobia. In addition one in nine adults harbor some kind of phobia, making it this country’s second most common mental-health problem behind alcoholism.

7. When one envisions the South, thoughts of Southern belles, cotton plantations and Scarlett O’Hara caress one’s mind. Unfortunately, those individuals who visualize such old fashioned scenarios have never visited the South. Most Southern towns are too small for cotton plantations and too barbaric for Scarlett or Rhett Butler.

8. Thousands of people in this country could make an overwhelming case for the banning of handguns, except for one convenient fact: they aren’t so much IN the country as UNDER it, abruptly sent to their graves with no chance to protest or dissuade.

9. Most of us have suffered the pains of romantic relationships that have ended. at such times, we must remember “that all good things must end”, but we should “put on a smiling face, nevertheless.”
Through the centuries, it has been interesting to examine the purpose of a college education. Unfortunately, I am only eighteen years old and don’t know much about the subject since this is my first term as a freshman. However, I’ll give it my best shot.

Answers

1. Thesis: D; Technique: Anecdote or incident.
2. Thesis: I; Technique: X unnecessary definition.
3. Thesis: K; Technique: Anecdote or incident
4. Thesis: A; Technique: Comparaison/ Analogy
5. Thesis: B; Technique: Quotation
8. Thesis: H; Technique: a controversial statement
9. Thesis: G; Technique: X a cliché