Writing introductory paragraphs

The introduction of an academic paper needs to provide three elements for the reader:

1. an appeal that will interest the reader,
2. information that establishes the context of the topic and will move the reader into the body of the paper, and
3. a claim or thesis about the topic.

# 1. Appealing to the interest of the reader

Writers can use any of several ways to introduce the reader to the topic:

* *Interesting quote*: Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” –*Aristotle*
* *Leading question*: Is it too late to prevent climate change?
* *Startling fact:* Heroin overdose deaths among women have tripled in the last few years. From 2010 through 2013, female heroin overdoses increased from 0.4 to 1.2 per 100,000.
* *Misconception or new way of viewing the subject:* The great white shark is far more fearsome in our imaginations than in reality.

# 2. Establishing a context

It is up to the writer to provide some relevant information regarding the issue to keep the reader interested and/or to move the reader into the body of the essay. For example, the writer could discuss the increase in claims of police brutality over the last few decades to establish the context for a persuasive paper on providing body cameras to law enforcement officers. **In a comparison/contrast paper**, the topics of the comparison will need to be generally described**. In a rhetorical analysis**, the introductory paragraph should introduce the author and article to be analyzed, as well as the topic to be discussed. This might also be the place to generally explain a theory that will be addressed or terms that will be used.

# 3. Establishing a claim/thesis

This is the last section of the introductory paragraph where the writer lets the reader know what position they are taking regarding the topic or issue or what they are going to prove. Perhaps the writer is going to explain the causes or effects of an issue or convince the reader that a plan of action should be taken to solve a problem. In a rhetorical analysis, this is the place where the writer will assess whether an author was effective in their use of rhetorical strategies, as well as identifying which strategies will be analyzed. By naming these strategies or providing the main supporting points that the writer will discuss in proving this position, the writer is **forecasting** or providing a roadmap to help organize the essay’s body paragraphs.

## Examples of Claim/Thesis Statement

*Cause/effect with three forecast points:* The requirement for students to pass standardized tests in order to graduate from high school has resulted in ***protests from parents and students, a curriculum that fails to engage students, and an unfair representation of student abilities***.

*Plan of action with three forecast points:* People need to be educated about the serious, man-made problem of water pollution, which **harms the health of humans and animals, destroys the environment**, and **causes an enormous economic burden on governments.**

*Article analysis with effective use of three rhetorical strategies:* Alexie uses **figurative language, repetition, and irony** to effectively send the message that with perseverance one can achieve one’s goals.

# Sample Introductory Paragraph

Online education has become more popular over the last decade. According to author Frank D. Smith, more than 300,000 students attended online schools during the 2013-2014 school year.

[An interesting fact is used to engage the reader in the topic of the paper.]

Although traditional, state-sanctioned home schooling taught by parents or hired instructors using print materials has been around for many years, it is a more recent phenomenon that students have received their education exclusively through electronic curricula via computer. Formerly, students who lived in remote areas like the Alaskan wilderness or who had serious illnesses that prevented them from attending regular public schools for long periods of time used distance learning to earn school credit. However, as more families became disenchanted with public schools and students’ academic needs became more unique, the easy access to online learning has made it a popular option.

[This background information discusses the general history of how online schooling became more popular, moving from traditional home schooling to education through a computerized curriculum. It provides the context that leads to the writer’s claim/thesis.]

Online education provides students flexibility in **when they learn, where they learn, how they learn,** and **what they learn**.

[This thesis statement focuses on the flexibility of online learning. By forecasting on four main concepts, the writer sets up the organizing elements for their body paragraphs.]

**Work cited:**

Smith, D. Frank. “7 Telling Statistics About the State of K–12 Online Learning.” *Ed Tech*, 26 Nov, 2014. edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2014/11/7-telling-statistics-about-state-k-12-online-learning.