

Introductions and Hooks

You are writing an essay. You have brainstormed, you have organized your ideas, you have written the thesis sentence. Ideas, facts, argument... Snooze. It all seems so boring and dull. How do you make an essay come to life and be interesting to the reader?

Think sensational. Think movie blockbuster. Think “I need to make the beginning of this essay so compelling that the reader will not want to stop reading to go do anything else! What kind of strategy can I use to do that?”

A strategy is a plan for achieving a task. In the case of writing an essay introduction, this strategy can take many forms. You can use a quotation, a startling fact, a historical summary, a chronology, an anecdote, a statistic, a personal experience, an example, a review of a controversy, a question or an emotional plea. The strategy you use depends on the essay topic, the style of the essay and the amount and kinds of information you have to draw on to develop your ideas. A quotation, startling fact, statistic, historical summary, chronology or review of a controversy is often used in a formal writing situation, such as a research paper or academic essay, because there is an availability of detailed facts at hand upon which to base the essay. An anecdote, personal experience, example, question or emotional plea can be used effectively in a formal writing situation but it also lends itself to use in more casual writing situations such as reflection essays and personal narratives.

Below are examples of some of these types in an introductory paragraph; the thesis sentence is underlined. The section that follows includes assignments you can do on your own or with others.

Quotation

“When you forgive, you love. And when you love, God's light shines through you.” That’s what Ron Franz told his friend Christopher McCandless in the film “Into the Wild” in the scene where McCandless embarked once again on his futile journey to Alaska. Franz, an elderly man whose wife and son were killed in an auto accident, had lived alone for many years before meeting McCandless. Franz felt an affinity for the young man and wanted to adopt him or at least make him into the family that Franz had ever known. In sharing his insights about love and light with McCandless, he was being introspective about his own losses at the same time he was offering advice to McCandless. The message was not lost on McCandless, although it would take another six months or so for the young man, on his death bed in the Alaskan wilderness, to forgive his parents for raising him the way they did. Franz, and McCandless, neither of whom were profoundly religious, took to heart the familiar religious message that love and light are gifts from God that must be experienced to be shared.

Startling Fact

Eighteen people each day will die waiting for an organ for a desperately needed transplant. One organ donor can save up to eight lives. Volunteering to donate organs can usually be done quickly and easily, when renewing a driver’s license or registering online through an organ donor registry. Volunteering to donate organs is the first step in a process that can save lives and money and benefit others.

