Developing Introduction Paragraphs

A well-developed introduction paragraph should be at least 6-8 sentences in length and include the following components:

- **hook**
- **general background information**
- **thesis**

I.   HOOK

Start the essay with a catchy "hook" to engage the reader.
A hook is like an appetizer that the whets the appetite of the reader for the main course. Be clever or interesting. Don't start the essay with the thesis. The following are strategies for starting the essay in an engaging way.

1. **Description:** Vividly describe a scene with sense details (sight, sound, smell). Create a vivid image like quick *snapshot* of people, places or things relevant to your topic

2. **Narration:** Tell a brief story or anecdote, like a 3-4 sentence news clip or a short personal experience. Rather than a snapshot, narration is more like a short video relevant to your topic.

3. **Rhetorical Question:** Ask 1-2 thought-provoking questions of your reader that relate to your thesis. Make sure the questions are not easily answered by a yes or no.

4. **Quotation**: Locate a quote from an expert in the field you are discussing. Find a relevant proverb or quote from a literary source such as Shakespeare or even from a popular advertisement.

5. **Startling Information:** Give facts or statistics that might seem unusual or dramatic to your reader. Or give graphic examples that cause an emotional response about your topic.

6. **Definition:** Define some important concept of your topic or a significant word related to your topic. Explain what the word really means or how the term is misunderstood.

7. **Compare/Contrast:** Compare or contrast your topic to something your reader would be familiar with. Perhaps use a *metaphor* to make the comparison which supports your thesis.

8. **Reversal:** Begin by pretending to support the opposite side of your thesis, perhaps even exaggerating the position. Then use a transition to return to the actual position of your thesis.

9. **Combination:** Focus on one introductory method to get started, and add other strategies that seem to work well together to present your topic.

II.   BACKGROUND

Add "Background Information" linking the hook to the thesis. Give the reader some general background or a brief overview of the topic. This might include a brief history of the problem or controversy, some recent events which make the topic timely or urgent, or some general facts or statistics that provide the readers with a base level of knowledge about the topic so they can proceed with your analysis. Sentences must logically lead to thesis. Use an appropriate transition to achieve a smooth flow and avoid an abrupt shift to thesis.

III.   THESIS

End with the thesis. The thesis is the claim or the assertion that you are presenting in your essay and is generally stated at the end of the introduction. It should be a complete sentence that asserts an opinion. It should not be a fact or question.

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Practice Exercise

An effective introduction paragraph includes a **1) catchy hook**, **2) general background** information, and **3) a clear, specific thesis**. Using the template below, write an effective introductory paragraph that includes all three components. Refer to the "Developing Introduction paragraphs" handout, and begin the paragraph with one of the hook ideas. Then smoothly transition to the background information. Write 3-4 background sentences linking the hook to the thesis. These background sentences might include a historical overview of the topic, a description of the current situation, some general facts or statistics about the topic, or an explanation of why this is an important topic to consider. Then, smoothly transition to the thesis which is the final sentence of the introduction paragraph. Use transition words when necessary and create a paragraph that is at least 6-8 sentences long.

"Problems in California Public Schools"

(Identify the kind of hook used) _____

Hook: _____

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Background Information linking hook to thesis: _____

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Thesis: Overcrowded Classrooms, deteriorating facilities, and lack of qualified teachers are creating complex problems in California public schools.