

# SSU Writing Center

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## Writing Great Introductions

The beginning of a piece of writing has one purpose: to grab the reader's attention and inspire him or her to read further. You may have been told at some point that good introductions summarize the major points you're wishing to make in your paper; this is indeed one powerful strategy. However, don't limit yourself. If you think about the pieces of writing which have grabbed you, you'll probably find that few if any have begun with a dry enumeration of the paper's contents.

Remember that many kinds of writing have genre conventions that dictate how the paper should start. Check with your instructor if you suspect that he or she will be expecting to see certain information in your opening.

Here are some commonly used strategies whereby writers generate anticipation and interest at the outset:

- Tell a brief anecdote that bears on your argument or that raises the issues you're about to discuss. Everyone everywhere loves to read or listen to stories.
- Start with a pithy quotation and discuss what it means for the paper you're writing.
- Lay out the problem or issue you're addressing by summarizing its history.
- Begin with a question--the central, underlying question which drives your essay ("What were the causes of the Civil War?" "How can Jungian analysis help survivors of trauma?" "Was Hamlet really in love with his mother?"). The remainder of the paper will answer this question, and a one-sentence answer you provide at some point will be your thesis.
- Present some vivid description of a person, place, or thing. Next to stories, people love imagery most.
- Open with a strong opinion. Yes, It's OK to present your argument straight off, in strong terms. Use this strategy when you wish to create a sense of urgency.

You probably get the idea. Use your creativity and energy to set the stage for the paper in an exciting, attention-grabbing way. There are lots of ways to do this, and the above strategies are just a few time-honored ones.