

UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

INTRODUCTIONS

The introduction sets up your paper by identifying for your readers a piece of conventional wisdom (the motive) and then telling them how your text pushes back against that wisdom (your thesis). Your thesis, in other words, is your argument. All introductions should follow this format: 1) open with a hook that will grab the reader's attention; 2) have a 2-3 sentence summary of the text you'll be analyzing (be sure to include the name of the text and author and text); 3) the motive; and 4) the thesis. The most successful introductions open with a hook: something that draws your reader in and makes them want to read more.

Of course, there are many ways to begin an introduction, but here are three tried and true methods:

1. Go from the particular to the general by using a quotation or detail from the text.

- a. Example: In his book *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanathi tells the story of a close colleague, Jeff, who commits suicide because he feels responsible for the death of a patient: “[Jeff], uh—he apparently had a difficult complication, and his patient died. Last night he climbed onto the roof of a building and jumped off” (114).

This kind of opening sentence should be followed by a sentence connecting it to your topic. For example, if my topic explores how Paul finds meaning through death, I might write something like: “Paul considers this example and many others as he searches for the meaning of life.”

2. Go from the general to the particular by using a quotation from outside the text.

- a. Example: As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “It is not the length of life, but depth of life.”

Again, you will need to follow this kind of quotation with a sentence that connects to your topic, i.e., “Similarly, since Paul Kalanathi knows his life will be cut short, he focuses on making the most of what is left of his time.”

3. Open with a current events story that connects to your topic.

To do this, first identify a theme of your paper that is relevant today. For example, I might try to find something about physician burnout and discuss how that was not an issue facing Kalanathi because of the limited time he had to practice medicine.

- a. Example: In the *New York Times* article “Today’s Doctors: Overburdened and Burning Out,” the author explores how and why so many doctors suffer from job fatigue. However, neurosurgeon Paul Kalanathi will never experience physician burnout since he dies from lung cancer at the age of 33.

Credit: Lisa Rourke, University Writing Program, 2020.

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