

## MOTIVATING MOVES

### **Definition of Motive (according to Gordon Harvey):**

“The intellectual context that you establish for your topic and thesis at the start of your essay, in order to suggest why someone, besides your instructor, might want to read an essay on this topic or need to hear your particular thesis argued—why your thesis isn’t just obvious to all, why other people might hold other theses (that you think are wrong). Your motive should be aimed at your audience: it won’t necessarily be the reason you first got interested in the topic (which could be private and idiosyncratic) or the personal motivation behind your engagement with the topic. Indeed it’s where you suggest that your argument isn’t idiosyncratic, but rather is generally interesting. The motive you set up should be genuine: a misapprehension or puzzle that an intelligent reader (not a straw dummy) would really have, a point that such a reader would really overlook. Defining motive should be the main business of your introductory paragraphs, where it is usually introduced by a form of the complicating word ‘But.’”

### **Possible Motivating Moves:**

1. The truth isn’t what one would expect, or what it might appear to be on first reading.
2. There is an interesting wrinkle in the matter, a complexity that appears on closer examination.
3. Something that seems simple or common or obvious has more implications or explains more than it may seem.
4. There is a contradiction, mystery, or tension that needs investigation.
5. There is an ambiguity, something unclear that could mean two or more things.
6. We can learn about a larger phenomenon by studying this smaller one.
7. A seemingly tangential or insignificant matter is actually important or interesting.
8. There is something implicit that needs to be made explicit.
9. The standard opinion of a text or a certain published view needs challenging or qualifying.
10. Published views of the matter conflict.

Credit: Adapted from Gordon Harvey, *The Elements of the Academic Essay*, 2009, and “Idea and Motive,” *UWS Instructors Resources*, Brandeis University

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