

Intro Paragraphs & Thesis Statements

An Academic Writing Workshop



Compiled by the
Academic Support Center
& the
Library Resources
Division

About this Workshop Series

Strong academic writing does not typically develop “naturally”; rather, it is an acquired skill that all college students must learn. Even the most skillful writers will have room for improvement. This workshop series thus aims to break down the writing process into key focus areas for improvement. By following these tips and techniques, you can become a more effective writer, whatever your level.

Approaching Writing

First, we must recognize academic writing as a Process. Strong essays cannot be written overnight! Be sure to schedule in time for:

- Pre-writing – brainstorm words or phrases, free write for 5 minutes, create a thought cluster, etc.
- Planning – create a thesis, assemble evidence, create an outline
- Practice – draft, edit, & repeat!



Outlining: a Critical Blueprint

Strong academic writing has a clear structure. Start by drafting an outline to help you stay on track.

Sample Outline:

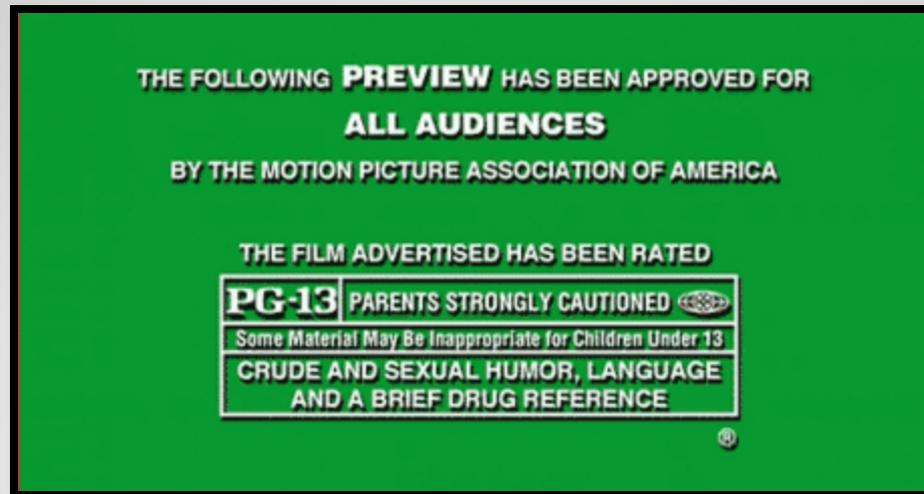
- Intro Paragraph
 - ✓ Hook
 - ✓ Context
 - ✓ Thesis
- Body Paragraph (repeat as needed)
 - ✓ Topic Sentence
 - ✓ Concrete Detail
 - ✓ Analysis
 - ✓ Transition Sentence
- Conclusion
 - ✓ Summary
 - ✓ Significance



No architect would construct a building without a detailed floor plan; why would anyone attempt to write an essay without an outline?

An Intro to Intro Paragraphs

*The Intro Paragraph is the most important part of your essay. It should give the reader a **concise overview of everything that is to follow**, the way a film preview does for a movie.*



Choosing a Topic



Avoid writing on a topic that is...

- ❖ **Too broad**...it will make it harder to focus your writing, rather than give you more to work with
- ❖ **Too personal**...it will not be academic in nature if it's all based on personal experience or opinion
- ❖ **Too skimpy in evidence**...you can argue whatever you want, as long as there is supporting evidence!
- ❖ **Too factual**...it's difficult to make an argument out of something that is entirely factual. There's no wiggle room!

Elements of an Intro Paragraph

A strong introductory paragraph sets the stage for the essay by providing:

- a **hook** to lure the reader in
- **context** to explain what book, text, or theory will be used to further discuss this topic
- and a **thesis** to make your argument



Using a Hook

The *hook* grabs the reader's interest by introducing a *topic*. Be careful not to make this statement too broad or too specific



Too Broad:

Some things in life seem destined to happen, regardless of what we do to try to stop them.

Too Specific:

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers are doomed from the start, and sure enough, end up dying by the play's end.

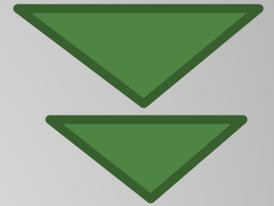
Just Right:

Many of Shakespeare's tragedies illustrate the concept that individual will is no match for pre-ordained fate.

Elements of an Intro Paragraph

Definition of Context:

The **context** guides our discussion of our topic by situating us within a particular text, historical time, or theoretical frame. We move from a broader topic to a specific context.



Example:

Romeo and Juliet is a classic Shakespearean tragedy in this sense. In it, the young lovers struggle to overcome many barriers in order to be together.

Drafting a Thesis Statement

*The thesis makes a **claim** about your topic or text, lays out **key evidence** to support this claim, and explains the **significance** of this*

Identifying thesis elements:

- **Claim:** WHAT are you saying about the book?
- **Evidence:** HOW do you know this?
- **Significance:** WHY does this matter?



Let's try it!

❖ Claim:

The play reinforces the idea that individuals are powerless to change their fates

❖ Evidence:

The chorus uses foreshadowing, Romeo and Juliet are characterized as young and naïve, their final deaths are caused by situational irony

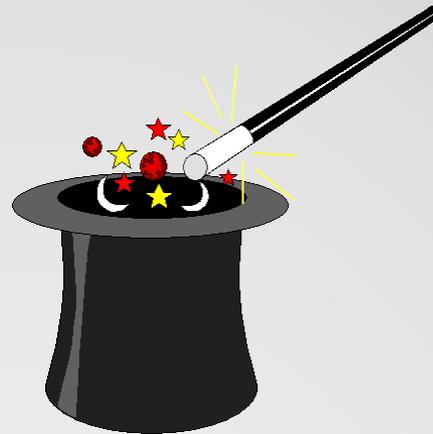
❖ Significance:

The course of our lives cannot be changed by hard work or wily, we must accept our destinies.

Drafting the Thesis Statement

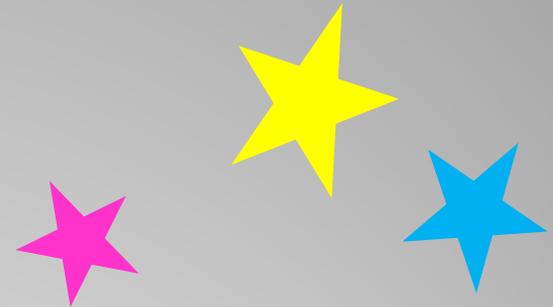
When in doubt, use the *magic sentence*.

“Through (*EVIDENCE*), the book reveals that (*CLAIM*); thus, the book shows us that (*SIGNIFICANCE*).





Ta Da!



Through the foreshadowing element of the chorus, the characterization of Romeo and Juliet as young and naïve, and the situational irony of the final scene, the play reinforces the idea that individuals are powerless to change their fates. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet thus serves as a reminder that the course of fate cannot be altered by hard work or cunning; we must accept our fate as is.



*Want more on this topic?
Ready to work on your thesis
with a writing tutor?*

Contact the Academic Support Center at:

Building 32, Suite B-103

asc@udc.edu

202-274-5938

Thank you!