

Introduction to a Persuasive Essay

LC SHOWS YOU HOW TO PACK A PUNCH IN YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH AND PRIME YOUR READER FOR PERSUASION

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If you've ever been to the theater to see a movie or a play, then you know how important the first scene is. If it doesn't grab your attention and make you excited for what's going to happen next, then chances are you won't enjoy the rest of the show. The same goes for the opening paragraph in a persuasive essay. This introduction is your only opportunity to make your reader want to sit up and listen to what you have to say, so you have to make it count.

> FIRST THINGS FIRST

A persuasive essay asks you to take a position on a debatable issue and present an argument for your point of view. Before you even start writing a persuasive essay, you have to explore the topic and do research. If you were asked whether you were in favor of a certain bill being passed in Congress, you would need to first find out what the bill was, find out why the bill was proposed and what problem it claimed to solve, research that problem, and then ask yourself if you thought the bill would actually solve it. You might want to look up the opinions of some congressional representatives who opposed or supported the bill in order to have a sense



of the arguments on both sides. Take notes on all the facts involved and write down quotes that you'd like to use in your essay. This is your evidence.

> A PARAGRAPH WITH A MISSION

The introduction to your persuasive essay needs to accomplish three things:

1. Engage the reader
2. Explain the issue at hand
3. Establish your point of view

This is a lot to pack into one short paragraph, which is

why some students find introductions tough to write. If you're one of them, these guidelines will help you make the most out of your intro.

> **DRAMATIC DEBUT**

Imagine that your essay is a play and the opening paragraph is the first scene. When the curtain rises, the audience expects to see something happen immediately. Don't disappoint them. Make your first two or three sentences crackle with life. Have fun with them. Use a metaphor, a reference to a current event, or some other hook to get your reader's attention. If you are writing about genetic testing, don't begin your essay with a statement like, "Genetic testing is a very important issue in America today." Duh! That's why you're writing about it. Instead, try to show its importance through a fact that will be interesting to the reader. "In 2002, nearly 100 cancer studies included some form of genetic testing. Of these, 10 generated drugs that show some promise of curing the disease."

> **SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISSUE**

Now that you've got your reader interested in genetic testing, you need to explain what the issue involves. "While many scientists believe that genetic experiments on human cells hold the key to curing diseases like AIDS and cancer, some believe that stem cell testing is morally wrong, and bills have been proposed in Congress to halt testing." You might go on to show a little bit more of the arguments on each side so your reader understands the full scope of the issue.

> **YOUR LINE**

Once you have laid out the issue fully but concisely, assert your own position. Be decisive. Come down on one side of the debate and make your opinion clear to the reader. The sentence in which you declare your point of view is called a thesis. It is usually placed toward the end of the introduction. If your essay is going to convince your reader of your opinion, then your

thesis has to be clear and you have to have a strong argument to back it up. An example of a clear thesis is: "AIDS and cancer kill millions of people annually, and if genetic testing can help save lives, scientists have a moral obligation to use it." With a clear thesis statement, the rest of your essay will fall into place.

> **DON'T GIVE AWAY THE ENDING**

A lot of students make the mistake of trying to pack their whole paper into the introduction. You don't have to tell the reader everything you are going to say right up front. In fact, you shouldn't, because it ruins the suspense! Your reader will be intrigued by the various angles of the issue that you describe in the opening sentences and will be curious to see how you resolve the issue. Your thesis should be a tantalizing taste of the argument to come. While your thesis should be clear, it need not do more than state your position. A thesis indicates where the essay is headed, but it shouldn't give away how you are going to get there. That's the job of the supporting paragraphs. So, save the nuances of your argument and by all means keep your evidence for the paragraphs to follow. Let the introduction whet your reader's appetite for the persuasive performance that's about to unfold.

>>ACT TWO: Your introduction sets the stage for the dramatic performance to follow: the development of your argument in the supporting paragraphs. Next month, LC shows you how to build your case with evidence, organize the flow of the essay, keep your reader entertained, and conclude with a grand finale.

POINTS OF PERSUASION

HERE ARE SOME SAMPLE PERSUASIVE ESSAY TOPICS:

- >> Do we need arts programs in public schools?
- >> Who really won the 2000 presidential election?
- >> Are professional athletes overpaid?
- >> Is Holden Caulfield a sympathetic character?
- >> Which flavor is better: chocolate or vanilla?