

## Lesson Five: Introductions

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The introduction is the first sentence of your essay and it plays the dual role of setting the theme of your essay and engaging the reader. The introduction should not be overly formal. You do not want an admissions officer to start reading your essay and think, "here we go again." Although admissions officers will try to give the entire essay a fair reading, they are only human – if you lose them after the first sentence, the rest of your essay will not get the attention it deserves.

## General Tips

- **Don't Say Too Much.** Just tell the story! Your introduction should not be so complex and so lengthy that it loses the reader before they even start. You have the rest of the essay to say what you want. There's no need to pack it all into the first sentence. This leads to the next tip.
- **Don't Start Your Essay with a Summary.** If you summarize, the admissions officer does not need to read the rest of your essay. You want to start your essay with something that makes the reader want to read until the very end. Once you have drawn the reader in through the first one to three sentences, the last sentence in your introductory paragraph should explain clearly and briefly what the point of the whole essay is. That is, why you are using this person, place, or thing. What does it say about you?
- **Create Mystery or Intrigue in your Introduction.** It is not necessary or recommended that your first sentence give away the subject matter. Raise questions in the minds of the admissions officers to force them to read on. Appeal to their senses and emotions to make them relate to your subject matter.

## Types of Introductions

Please select a link below for examples and descriptions of various introductions.

- [Academic Introduction](#)
- [Creative Introduction](#)
- [Action Introduction](#)
- [Dialogue Introduction](#)
- [Overarching Societal Statements](#)
- [Personal Introduction](#)
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- **Quotation Introduction**

**Note:** The below essays were not edited by EssayEdge Editors. They appear as they were initially reviewed by admissions officers.

**Academic Introduction:** This is the type of introduction you would use for a standardized test or a history paper. A typical standard introduction answers one or more of the six basic questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. It gives the reader an idea of what to expect. You should try to stay away from simply restating the question unless you are limited by a word count and need to get to the point quickly. Your basic academic introduction or thesis statement is best used as the follow-up sentence to one of the more creative introductions described below.

**Examples:**

*One of the greatest challenges I've had to overcome was moving from Iran to the United States. Iran was in deep political turmoil when I left, as it is today.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This introduction is clear and to the point, and will prepare your reader for the ideas you want to discuss. However, it is rather unexciting and will not immediately engage your reader. As mentioned, you should try to preface it with a more creative statement. In addition, it makes one typical error. One should usually avoid using contractions in a formal essay, for example, "I've."

*Through all of my accomplishments and disappointments, I have always been especially proud of the dedication and fervor I possess for my personal beliefs and values.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This is a very effective introduction to an essay about your personality. Mentioning pride is a good way to indicate how important your beliefs and values are to you. In a sentence like this, however, it would be better to use "Throughout" rather than "Through." "Throughout" better expresses the widespread, expansive tone you want to give this sentence.

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**Creative Introduction:** A creative introduction catches the reader off-guard with an opening statement that leaves the reader smiling or wondering what the rest of the essay contains.

**Examples:**

*Imagine yourself a freshman in high school, beginning your independence. As the oldest child, I was the first to begin exploring the worlds of dating, extra-curricular clubs and upperclassmen. However, one afternoon my*

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*parents sat my two sisters and me down. They said.*

**EssayEdge Says:** The power of this introduction is that it places the reader in your shoes, making him or her more interested in what takes place in the rest of the essay. Its main mistake is that its informality gives the essay a slightly hokey or corny tone. Although a greater degree of informality is allowed in a creative essay, you must be careful not to take it too far.

*I am a dynamic figure, often seen scaling walls and crushing ice. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention. I translate ethnic slurs for Cuban refugees, I write award-winning operas, I manage time efficiently. Occasionally, I tread water for three days in a row.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This introduction is both creative and effective. It amuses the reader by listing a bizarre and probably fictitious set of achievements, thus demonstrating the writer's imagination (and poking fun at the admissions process). At the same time, its light tone avoids sounding too obnoxious. As a note, you should remember that good use of semicolons will impress your reader: "I translate ethnic slurs for Cuban refugees; I write award-winning operas; I manage time efficiently."

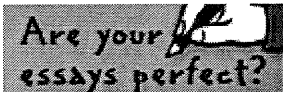
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**Action Introduction:** An Action Introduction takes the reader into the middle of an action sequence. By not building up to the story, it forces the reader to read on to find out not only the significance of this moment in time, but what led up to and followed it. It is perfect for short essays where space must be conserved or for narrative essays that begin with a story.

**Examples:**

*I promised God I would eat all my peas, but He didn't care. A confused eleven-year-old girl, I sat and listened to my father pace. With each heavy step echoing loudly throughout the silent house, my family's anxiety and anticipation mounted while awaiting news of my grandfather's health. My heart racing, I watched the clock, amazed that time could crawl so slowly. Finally, the telephone interrupted the house's solemn silence. I heard my father repeating the words "yes, yes, of course." He then hung up the receiver and announced my grandfather's death and cancer's victory.*

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**EssayEdge Says:** This is the kind of introduction that will immediately intrigue your reader because it begins with a very

unusual declaration. The image of a little girl eating peas and hoping to acquire God's help is charming while hinting at the solemnity of the situation described.

*Surrounded by thousands of stars, complete silence, and spectacular mountains, I stood atop New Hampshire's Presidential Range, awestruck by nature's beauty. Immediately, I realized that I must dedicate my life to understanding the causes of the universe's beauty.*

**EssayEdge Says:** The first ten words of this essay will catch your reader's attention, mainly because they create a mental image of perfect natural beauty. Note that you should try to avoid repeating key words. In this instance, it would be easy to avoid repeating the word "beauty." You could simply use "magnificence" or "loveliness" instead.

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**Dialogue Introduction:** Like the action introduction, the dialogue introduction brings the reader directly into the action, only this time in the form of dialogue. If you are writing about an influential figure in your life, you can mention a quote from this person that exemplifies the importance that he or she had on your life.

**Examples:**

*"You must stop seeing that Russian girl, " I ordered my brother when he returned home last summer from the University of Indianapolis. Echoing the prejudiced, ignorant sentiment that I had grown up with, I believed it was wrong to become seriously involved with a person who does not follow the Hindu religion and is not a member of the Indian race.*

**EssayEdge Says:** Multicultural awareness is a key aspect of fitting in well at a university, and admissions officers are very aware of this. Thus, it is an excellent idea to mention how you expanded your cultural sensitivity. Beginning the essay by admitting that you were once less tolerant is a compelling way to demonstrate just how much you have grown as a person.

*On the verge of losing consciousness, I asked myself: "Why am I doing this?" Why was I punishing my body? I had no answer; my mind blanked out from exhaustion and terror. I had no time to second-guess myself with a terrifying man leaning over my shoulder yelling: "You can break six minutes!" As flecks of spit flew from his mouth and landed on the handle bar of the ergometer, I longed to be finished with my first Saturday rowing practice and my first fifteen-hundred-meter "erg test."*

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**EssayEdge Says:** The power of this introduction comes from its attention to detail. The question "Why am I doing this?" gains support from every horrible detail: the exhaustion, the terrifying man, and the specks of spit flying from his mouth! With such strong supporting evidence, the quotation takes on a life of its own. Your reader will find himself thinking, "Why would anyone do that? I'd like to find out."

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**Overarching Societal Statements:** Rather than using a traditional thesis statement you can put forth a societal observation that ties into the theme of your essay. This can be very effective if the statement is unique and gives a glimpse into how you view the world. It can be detrimental if your statement is debatable or unclear. Make sure that if you use this form of introduction that no admissions office will take offense to it.

**Examples:**

*High school is a strange time. After three years of trying to develop an identity and friends in middle school, students are expected to mature immediately on the first day of ninth grade.*

**EssayEdge Says:** Be careful not to make statements in your introduction that seem too exaggerated or unrealistic. After all, no one expects a student to immediately mature on the first day of ninth grade. Moreover, if your reader senses that you attained most of your maturity at the beginning of high school, he or she might be less than impressed with your character development. It would be better to state, "students are expected to enter a new environment in which they must function with far greater maturity."

*To this day, the United States remains driven by the American Dream, and we often hear of immigrants who come to this country to search for opportunities that their native countries lack. In these tales, immigrants succeed through hard work, dedication, and a little luck. As idealistic as the story may seem, I have been fortunate enough to experience its reality in the life of one very important man. His example has had great impact on my personal expectations and goals, and the manner in which I approach my own life.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This is an excellent way to introduce a discussion of a person who has influenced you significantly. Instead of launching immediately into a list of this man's excellent qualities and admirable accomplishments, this introduction lays the foundation for a comprehensive look at just why the man had such a profound impact on you. It also places the most importance on the American Dream, as is fitting in an essay like this one.

*Art is a reflection of one's self-identity in the most*

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*unaffected manner. Because art is very personal, it has no right or wrong. The type of art that has influenced me most is music.*

**EssayEdge Says:** The first two sentences in this introduction set the kind of tone you want to maintain throughout your essay: introspective and creative. However, it moves on to a very boring and stilted structure in the third sentence. To keep the tone creative, you could replace that sentence with the following: "Although artistic expression can take many forms, it is music that has captivated me."

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**Personal Introduction:** The Personal Introduction takes the reader directly into your mind. It says, "This is what it is like to be me. Let me take you to my little world." Since there is a little voyeur in even the most stern admissions officer, this type of introduction can be very effective. It is always in the first person and usually takes an informal, conversational tone:

**Examples:**

*At times, I think the world around me is crumbling to the ground, but it never does. Like most people, I face the crunches of deadlines and endless demands on my time, but I have never encountered the type of adversity that can crush people, that can drive people crazy, that can drive them to suicide.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This introduction is indeed compelling, but it raises important questions about appropriate content. Be careful to avoid writing a personal essay that is far too personal. You do not want your reader to think that you might have character weaknesses that prevent you from handling stressful situations well.

*I chuckle to myself every time I think about this. I am perceived as a mild-mannered, intelligent individual until I mention that I am involved in riflery.*

**EssayEdge Says:** Did the first sentence of this introduction confuse you? This was no doubt its intention. By creating a little mystery in the first sentence, the reader is forced to keep reading and keep wondering, "what is this kid's secret?" until the final word, which pops in the reader's mind, sort of like a gunshot: "riflery."

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**Question Introduction:** Many admissions essays begin with a question. While this is an easy way to begin an essay, admissions officers

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may perceive it as a "lazy introduction." No one wants to read an essay that begins with such tacky material as: "To be or not to be?" or "Are you looking for an applicant who has drive and determination? Well, I'm your guy." If you are going to use a question, make sure that it is an extremely compelling one and that your experiences provide answers.

**Example:**

*Influence? Why is it that the people who influence us most influence us in ways that are not easily quantified? Through her work with abused children, my mother has shown me the heroism of selfless dedication to a worthy cause.*

**EssayEdge Says:** With one word, this introduction takes an essay question about the person who has most influenced you and turns it back around to the admissions board. In effect, you are telling them that you have thought about their question thoroughly. You have thought about it for so long that you have a couple of questions of your own - questions that have sparked an interesting commentary.

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**Quotation Introduction:** Many writers are tempted to start their essay with a quote. You should try to resist this temptation, as most quotes will look forced. Admissions officers will be turned off if it is apparent that you searched through a book of famous quotes and came up with a quote from some famous philosopher about whom you know nothing. The quotation introduction is most effective when the quote you choose is unusual, funny, or obscure, not too long, and from those to whom you are closest. Choose a quote with a meaning you plan to reveal to the reader as the essay progresses. The admissions committee is interested in how you respond to the quote and what that response says about you.

**Examples:**

*John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." I see academics as a similar two-way interaction: in the classroom, I will do much more than take up valuable space. Because of the broad range of experiences I have had, my knowledge of many subjects is thorough. These experiences will help me perform well in any class, as I have learned how to use my time efficiently.*

**EssayEdge Says:** This is a risky quote with which to begin an essay. After all, it is difficult to imagine a more time-worn or oft-repeated statement. However, this introduction goes on to apply this quote in a relatively unique manner. The contrast between such a standard quotation and such an interesting application will likely catch your reader's attention.

*"Experience is what you receive when you don't*

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*get what you want." I remembered my father's words as I tried to postpone the coming massacre. Just as during the fall of the Roman Empire, my allies became enemies and my foes turned into partners. In fast and furious action with property changing hands again and again, I rested my fate on the words of one man, hoping he would rescue me from this dangerous tailspin. Do these experts realize the heartbreak they are inflicting on my young life? While the uncertainty of tomorrow's attire is the most pressing concern for many seventeen-year-olds, I must worry about much greater issues! It is August 31, the market is down over 300 points and the value of my stock portfolio is falling fast.*

**EssayEdge Says:** Quoting a person with whom you enjoy a close relationship is generally preferable to quoting a famous source. This passage's strength comes from the brief, understated role that the quote plays. The short statement introduces the rest of the paragraph and presents the fundamental point, and then the essay moves on to examine specific details. This is the ideal role of a quotation.

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Now it's your turn. Select one of the above styles (or make up your own) and try to write an introduction to your essay. Spend some time picking the right style and choosing the best words possible.

### **Continue to Conclusions**

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