

Introduction to Persuasive Essay Writing: Hook Statements

A good introductory paragraph is between 4-10 sentences in length, begins with a hook strategy (i.e. begin with a quote, an unusual fact/statistic, a thoughtful or relevant question, background information, or a personal story), and ends with a clear thesis statement.

Not only should your hook serve to immediately grab the reader's interest, but it should be a natural lead-in to your thesis, and a meaningful opportunity for the reader to relate to the topic of your essay.

Make sure to include some transitional sentences between the hook and the thesis statement.

You may invent personal anecdotes, startling statements, vivid description, and/or interesting questions as hooks.

DO NOT MISATTRIBUTE QUOTES TO WRONGFUL SOURCES.

Example currently on the internet of misattributed quote:

Marilyn Monroe once said, "To all those girls who think they're fat for not being size zero, it is not you is ugly; it is society."

–Newsflash: There was no such thing as a size zero during Monroe's era!

DO NOT INVENT STATISTICS OR FABRICATE FACTS.

Example from a student's paper of fabricated statistic:

"Schools should not spend money on field trips since field trips are unsafe. According to *TIME Magazine*, 9 out of 10 students get injured when they go on a field trip."

Blatant lies spotted by the reader weaken your argument and make you sound like a fool.

Sample Hook Statements:

1. **Opening that provides general background information** Give readers the background information they will need in order to understand the body of your paper. You might need to define important terms, identify people and places, or provide a brief history.
 - a. **Hook:** Although friction between Native Americans and settlers existed from the moment the first Europeans arrived in North America, the “Trail of Tears” incident of 1830 marked the lowest point in America’s relationship with its native population. **Transition/Lead-in:** In defiance of an 1832 Supreme Court ruling declaring the Indian Removal Act of 1830 unconstitutional, Federal and Georgian authorities proceeded to force the exodus of fifteen thousand members of the Cherokee Nation from their homes in Georgia to Oklahoma, hundreds of miles to the west. Because of their suffering, the Cherokee people called the path they were forced to follow to Oklahoma “The Trail of Tears.” **Thesis:** The authorities who forced Native Americans to flee their homes were responsible for stripping Native Americans of their land, depriving them of their freedom, and forcing them to adapt and create a new culture.

2. **Opening with an unusual detail** This is something that people would likely not know and makes them want to read on to find out why.
 - a. **The pentagon has twice as many bathrooms as are necessary** (Source to follow here).

3. **Opening with a strong statement**
 - a. *Schindler's List* graphically portrays the horrific acts of German concentration camps in World War two.

4. **Opening with a quotation**
 - a. My mother always said, “The ultimate responsibility always lies within you, and the opportunities are the ones you create.”
 - b. John F. Kennedy once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” (If the quote is widely known, you do not have to include the source.)
 - c. **Quotation:** Hillary Rodham Clinton once said that “There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard” (Source to follow here).

- Grabber
- Transitional Sentence
- Thesis Statement

"Never do yourself what you can afford to pay someone else to do." That is a motto my brother lives by. Had I lived by it, too, I could have saved myself a large expense, much griminess, and a painful injury to my hand the last time I tried to fix a leaking toilet.

- Grabber
- Transitional Sentence
- Thesis Statement

H.L. Mencken defined "Puritanism" as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." The clerks at the Department of Motor Vehicles must be Puritans. They seem to do their best to see that each person who comes in to get a license or registration, has to wind through a confusing maze of lines, must wait an eternity for help, and has to remain standing the entire time.

- Grabber
- Transitional Sentence
- Thesis Statement

Writer Dave Gentry once said, "True friendship comes when silence between two people is comfortable." I know exactly what Mr. Gentry means. My best friend, Elizabeth Reynolds, and I, can talk on the phone for hours or we can sit together in the mountains or at the beach and just enjoy the silence. Since she's been my best friend for twenty-five years, we're able to connect in many ways.

5. **Opening with an anecdote**- Since most people enjoy a good story, an anecdote is often a good way to begin your essay. But make sure that the anecdote is short and to the point and relates to the main idea of your essay.
 - a. Yesterday morning I watched as my older sister left for school with a bright white glob of toothpaste gleaming on her chin. I felt no regret at all until she stepped onto the bus ...
 - b. I remember the time when I was in Mr. Day's 5th grade class...
 - c. One sunny afternoon while walking Blanca, my very sociable bullterrier, I decided to introduce her to Phillip, the mailman. At first, she was friendly, but as Phillip turned to leave, Blanca treacherously leaped for his buttocks and ripped off the back of Phillip's

blue and gray trousers. Fortunately, Phillip was not injured. Nevertheless, I was very concerned about my dog's behavior, so I took Blanca to my veterinarian to find out why she had acted so aggressively. Dr. Rios, Blanca's veterinarian, explained that there were three factors which could trigger an aggressive response from almost any dog.

In the following examples, notice how anecdotes have been used create lively introductions.

Grabber

Transitional Sentence

Thesis Statement

In *Lake Wobegone Days*, humorist Garrison Keillor tells of a retired dentist in a little Minnesota town. He sits in a fishing boat much of the the day. "Open wide," Dr. Nute says to the fish. "This may sting a little bit. Okay. Now bite down." Unfortunately, not all retired persons are so easily able to continue their once interesting professions in some form, as Dr. Nute has. In fact, retirees have a high death rate within the first six months after retirement, apparently because of boredom, and psychologists suggest three ways to prevent it.

Grabber

Transitional Sentence

Thesis Statement

When Jonathan Swift described Gulliver's trip to the land of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift depicted scientists who had one eye turned inward and the other aimed at the stars. In the case of two high school science teachers I had at this school, life imitates Swift's art. The school district should require all teachers, especially those in science, to have an interest in students as well as expertise and curiosity.

Grabber

Thesis Statement

The young man with the hammer hoisted himself onto the top of the wall. All around him on the wall and on the ground, people chanted and cheered. The young man knelt down, with his hammer, and began to chip at the cold, gray concrete. Little by little, the wall began to crumble. As I watched in amazement, it was hard to comprehend the fact that I was watching the Berlin Wall coming down.

6. **Opening with description**-- Depending on the length of your essay and your topic, you may decide to lead gradually into your thesis by depicting a scene that will appeal to your audience's senses and set the mood for you essay. Notice how this technique brings life to these introductions.

Grabber

Mile upon mile of brown Pennsylvania hills unfolded as I drove in and out of the curves and over the crests of Interstate 70. The world's worst forest fire could not have caused more destruction—and all because of the gypsy moth. If this pest is to be stopped, it will only be through the strong action of the government and private landowners.

Thesis Statement

Grabber

For anyone fortunate enough to have a wood-burning fireplace, sitting in front of a healthy fire on a frosty winter afternoon provides a sense of comfort and luxury. Unfortunately, many fireplace owners do not understand the three essential steps for achieving a successful fire. Everyone should learn the basics of preparing the fireplace, arranging the materials before igniting, and tending the fire.

Transitional Sentence

Thesis Statement

7. **Opening with a statistic of fact**- Sometimes a statistic or fact will add emphasis or interest to your topic. **It is necessary to include the source of your statistic or fact.**

- a. **Cigarettes are the primary cause of cancer.** (If the fact is undisputed and widely known and accepted, you do not have to cite a source.)
- b. **Fifty percent of marriages end up in divorce.** (If the fact is undisputed and widely known and accepted, you do not have to cite a source.)
- c. **"Seventy-two percent of Canadians have been directly related to a person, or persons, killed during WWII"** (Source to follow here).

8. **Opening with a question**- Questions can create personal interest in the essay, but be careful your question is not too general. For example, in an essay about cell phone use asking, “Do you own a cell phone?” is too general.

- a. What would you do if you discovered a secret that changed everything?
- b. Can you imagine how much a single day can cost if you live in Shibuya, Tokyo?

9. **Opening with an exaggeration or outrageous statement**

- a. The whole world watched as the comet flew overhead.
- b. If the government cuts any more money from education, the entire country will crumble.
- c. If I have to do one more chore around the house, I am going to go crazy!

10. **Opening by saying what is mistakenly believed to be true by many people; then using your thesis statement to provide correct information.**

Hook: Most Americans mistakenly believe that all rice is essentially the same. Lead in: They find it very difficult to understand why people from Asian countries are so particular about the type of rice they buy. In order to understand these preferences, Americans must become familiar with other varieties of rice and their characteristics.

In a literature class (rather than the FCAT Writes essay), you may summarize the literary work or works you are writing about; then follow with your thesis statement.

Many of the essays that you will write in literature classes will take this form.

The writer begins by briefly summarizing and the story; then he connects that to his opinion about the story and one of the broader social issues the story might bring out. Often these types of essays are in response to essay questions the teacher assigned.

This student might have been writing in response to **“Is it morally acceptable to change the basic nature of a human being by using science or medicine?”**

Daniel Keyes’ novel *Flowers for Algernon* tells the story of Charley, a mentally handicapped young man who undergoes an experimental procedure to increase his intelligence. Charley’s operation was successful, but his new mental capabilities were only temporary. Although first published in 1966, *Flowers for Algernon* correctly anticipates some of the controversies regarding human experimentation we are experiencing today. As techniques such as gene splicing become more advanced, the debate over the morality of modifying life from its natural forms will heat up.

Therefore, to avoid social upheaval, procedures that modify human beings, including intelligence enhancing operations such as Charley received, should be illegal.