

A P P E N D I X B

15 Ways to Write Your Introduction

As you read the following sample introductions, note that most combine more than one technique. Also, note that the information gets narrower and narrower until it connects to the thesis. Your goal is to introduce your thesis in a manner that is meaningful, engaging, and appropriate to your audience and purpose.

1. Analogy

Artists are to their studios as scientists are to their labs. Artists experiment with color, texture, and medium to discern the different effects these elements have on the eye and mind. Sometimes their experiments are fantastic successes; sometimes they fail terribly, just as scientists might. Rather than thinking of artists as visionaries driven by pain and inspiration, we should think of them as hardworking risk takers, willing to experiment until they solve the aesthetic problems they have set themselves to examine.

(Adapted from the *Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center* Web site)

2. Anecdote

On seeing another child fall and hurt himself, Hope, just 9 months old, stared, tears welling up in her eyes, and crawled to her mother to be comforted—as though she had been hurt and not her friend. When 15-month-old Michael saw his friend Paul crying, Michael fetched his own teddy bear and offered it to Paul; when that didn't stop Paul's tears, Michael brought Paul's security blanket from another room. Such small acts of sympathy and caring, observed in scientific studies, are leading researchers to trace the roots of empathy—the ability to share another's emotions—to infancy, contradicting a longstanding assumption that infants and toddlers are incapable of these feelings.

(From “Researchers Trace Empathy's Roots to Infancy” by Daniel Goleman)

3. Background Information

In his essay, first published in the *New York Times* in 1979, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” James Baldwin attempts to legitimize black English as a unique language. He argues that black English is a valid language because of the role it plays in the lives of black Americans; it serves as a means for blacks to control their own circumstances, define themselves, and obtain power. Baldwin justifies black English by applying George Orwell’s argument that language is “a political instrument, means, and proof of power” to the black experience (Orwell 436). Like black Americans, Chicanos have developed a language all their own—Spanglish. Just as black English plays a vital role for black people, Chicano speech serves an important purpose for Chicanos. Purpose, Baldwin argues, validates and makes language authentic. It is then the social, cultural, and political significance of Spanglish in the lives of Chicanos that legitimizes it as a language.

(From “‘Spanglish’: The Language of Chicanos” by Rosa María Jiménez)

4. Brief Description

As I walk into the academic building of my college, I can’t help stopping in front of the beautiful three-level octagonal fountain in the middle of the lobby. Its hugeness symbolizes the ideals of the college. Watching the clear water flowing from one level to another, my gaze comes to rest on various coins at the bottom of the third level. The coins are clearly visible: pennies, dimes, nickels, and a few quarters. Each coin, thrown by students as they rushed to class, expresses their hopes, goals, desires, and dreams. To some, it may be a simple wish to pass the next test; for others, it may be a wish for a successful future career; but to all, it represents a possibility of a better tomorrow. We can hear the soft whispers of the college promising its students a better future as we continue to invest our time, money, and energy. There is no doubt in our minds that the education we receive here will enable us to gain financial independence, respect, and, most importantly, control of our own destinies.

(Carmen Toro, Pueblo Community College student)

5. Definition of Terms

Recently, our local school district adopted a strategic plan emphasizing a new concept called *21st-century skills*. In particular, the plan states that local schools will provide all graduates with the 21st-century skills needed to compete in the international economy. Naturally, many citizens—parents, businesspeople, even teachers—are wondering exactly what this term means, and many are expressing the same kind of puzzlement we’ve seen repeatedly over the years when educational leaders adopt the latest “buzzword” as if it were the long-awaited silver bullet. However, though *21st-century skills* may sound like another fad term, it is really a new descriptor for a

very old concept: the broadly educated person. Simply, it refers to the integration of critical thinking, research, technical, and cultural/historical knowledge that has long characterized the well-educated human being.

If there is a significant difference between this concept and earlier educational trends, it may be a new sense of urgency: evidence is showing that if the U.S. is to remain competitive in the world economy, we simply must do a better job of producing graduates who possess the 21st-century skill set. The link between education and economic productivity has never been more openly part of the public agenda than it is today. Humanists regret this connection deeply, claiming that education should be a process of self-discovery and fulfillment, not a service to the state. Corporate leaders, on the other hand, unabashedly think of education as an assembly line for future workers. More moderate thinkers, however, are beginning to recognize that 21st-century skills can give us the best of both worlds: economic competitiveness as well as personal fulfillment. The time has come to drop our cynical and dismissive attitude toward educational change and give 21st-century skills a fighting chance.

(Renee Flores, Pueblo Community College student)

6. Figurative Language

I don't know why, in my sophomore year, I decided that I wanted to join the high school football team. I didn't like football and never watched it on TV. I wasn't the least bit athletic. The only triumph I'd ever had in this area was when, in fifth grade, I performed a handstand for a full 6 seconds, beating out my friend Bradley who went on to become an Olympic gymnast, but who had been kept home sick the previous week. I'd never even spoken with a football player—the players were all so wide you had to get out of the way when they came down the hall, and they had the sleekest-looking girls, dripping with confident sexual power and submissiveness, hanging on them in the hallways. The football players' big grins were always directed out there somewhere, beyond.

But when tryouts were held on that hot August Oklahoma afternoon, I was there. Once on the field (I'll leave aside the bit about needing help putting on the gear in the locker room), inside the unaccustomed helmet, I was on another planet. My senses were eerily distorted. I hardly knew where I was or which way to face; it was like being in a diving bell in the hot springs at Yellowstone. Sounds came from all directions and mingled with heat and exhaled fear and sweat. If you've ever breathed hot minestrone in an echo chamber, you are familiar with the sensation. Repeatedly that day, after the thronging human machine knocked me flat and pressed parts of my body into the hard ground, I found myself staggering to my feet, helplessly unaware of my purpose or location. The other players—coming into view as my helmet swung round pathetically—looked incredulously, pityingly, in my direction, sometimes for long minutes, not knowing what to make of this strange creature, this skinny-legged stork, this pink heron, in their midst.

It was an experience of feeling utterly out of place and threatened—fragile (if somewhat self-pitying) prey in a lions’ cage—that characterized the next few months of my life. For somehow I made the team. And though I never played in a single game, I did learn a lesson that year about how others might feel in similar situations: strangers, outcasts, or those who are just plain different.

(Frank Cerrano, Pueblo Community College student)

7. Historical Information

The history of jazz is well known among aficionados, at least in general outline. The story of jazz is intimately tied to the social history of the American 20th century; in fact, it is almost impossible to study the social history of the last hundred years without considering the important influence of America’s major indigenous art form.

Briefly, then, we might summarize the history of jazz as follows: It began in the great melting pot of New Orleans in the last years of the 19th century, mixing musical influences such as gospel, Delta blues, and various international forms into a vibrant dance hall music. It developed and spread to other cities primarily through the creative genius of one man, Louis Armstrong, becoming in the process a medium through which the most innovative musical ideas were introduced spontaneously, on the stage, in the form of improvised melodies. During World War II, jazz expressed itself mainly as big band swing music, and following the war, it evolved into the complicated small-ensemble form we know as bebop. The 1960s were a time of great experimentation in music, as well as in lifestyles, and jazz participated fully in this experimentation with the likes of John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman. Then in the 1970s, jazz began merging with popular music to create “fusion” styles under the influence of Miles Davis and others.

Where is jazz now? This is not an easy question to answer. Some maintain that jazz forever lost its distinctive voice when it blended with popular music in the seventies. Others say that jazz ran out of original ideas even earlier and that it has forever passed into the mists of time. However, if history teaches anything, it teaches that ideas have a way of returning with renewed vigor and fresh perspective. Jazz is no exception. The early 21st century is an exciting time for jazz fans to be alive, for our music is experiencing a new beginning. Just listen.

(Jeff Bailey, Pueblo Community College student)

8. Humor

Two million years ago, in a land not so far away, Chicago maybe, a lone woman put on her fur-lined, saber-toothed tiger outfit and went to the local pond for a quick dip. Then along came Mr. Macho Caveman, wearing bones in his nose and his hairy back combed with a fishbone brush. He spied our lovely cavewoman and said, “Me Tor. You lucky.” He grabbed her and added, “Me zug-zug you.” The

startled cavewoman picked up her wooly-mammoth club, bopped him on the head, and then walked away. Thus, the first jerk was disposed of. Since the beginning of time, women have been trying to fight off jerks. We have learned a few new ways since then, so with a little knowledge and a lot of civilization, here is a simple procedure that will help any woman get rid of a jerk.

(Catherine McDaniel, Pueblo Community College student)

9. Quotation

“Alone one is never lonely,” says May Sarton in her essay “The Rewards of Living a Solitary Life.” Most people, however, do not share Sarton’s opinion: They are terrified of living alone. They are used to living with others—children with parents, roommates with roommates, friends with friends, husbands with wives. When the statistics catch up with them, therefore, they are rarely prepared. Chances are high that most adult men and women will need to know how to live alone, briefly or longer, at some time in their lives.

(Tara Foster, student; from the *Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center* website)

10. Rhetorical Question

Why does it so often seem that men in our society need to demean the women with whom they work? For years we have read stories of men who, having attained a certain amount of power in their company, feel the need to hurt or demean those around them for nothing more than their own personal pleasures. Harassing comments or gestures that offend or make others feel threatened have become all too common in today’s world. It seems that men in positions of power believe they are not out of line when propositioning women in an inappropriate manner, promising advancement or raises in exchange for certain favors. As concerned citizens, we should demand better from one another and find a way to end this type of behavior. Until then, women will continue to be victims for three main reasons: fear, lack of support, and ignorance.

(Christopher Bush, Pueblo Community College student)

11. Short Narration

Never in my entire school career have I turned in an assignment on time. Ever since I was a child, I’ve saved important tasks until the last minute. When I was a little girl, getting ready for school in the morning was a job I couldn’t seem to accomplish on my own. While the school bus waited in front of my house, my mother would still be stuffing my books into my backpack and helping me on with my coat. Later, in high school, I couldn’t seem to start my homework assignments until it was nearly too late. Again, my mother would come to the rescue: she’d pull

out my books, open them to the right page, sit down with me at the table, and walk me step by step through the assignment herself. Now that I'm a college student, the situation hasn't improved much; in fact, without my mom to guide me, I often miss deadlines, and my grades are predictably bad.

Yes, I'm just another procrastinator. There are lots of us on campus. We are everywhere, and we are easy to identify. We're the ones who "forgot to bring our notes" or the ones who walk in late every day because our "car wouldn't start," when in fact we never took any notes and don't drive cars because we can't seem to follow through on buying them or getting them fixed. We are the ones who approach the teacher at the end of class to bargain for a little more time, and some of us have gotten good at succeeding in this bargain. We know how to manipulate those who, like my mom, have a soft heart for helping others. The problem, of course, is that we are only putting off the inevitable. At some point, we are going to have to get to work, or we will fail. And many of us do fail. Because I am on the verge of failing out of college, I recently joined a procrastinators' support group called Procrastinators Anonymous, and I'm learning a lot about this "disease," especially about what causes it. At the ripe age of 20, I'm finally learning about the factors that have made me what I am: fear of failure and criticism, lack of motivation, and enabling behaviors of others.

(Andrew Schwartz, Pueblo Community College student)

12. Startling Fact

About a fifth of all murders in the United States are committed by a relative of the victim and, in most cases, by the spouse. The police dread answering calls concerning domestic violence or family conflicts because of the vicious and dangerous nature of so many of these conflicts; in fact, more police officers are killed attempting to resolve these disputes than in almost any other type of situation they face (Miller 75). Studies indicate that each year around 7 million couples go through a violent episode in which one spouse tries to cause the other serious pain or injury (89). This outburst of violence in a group of partners who are supposed to love and care for each other is not easily explained, but studies suggest that the modern family may be under greater pressures than it can easily bear due to income, employment, family roles, and cultural environment.

(Author unknown)

13. Statistics

Multiple sclerosis is an autoimmune and neurological disorder that affects 2.5 million people worldwide, including 400,000 Americans. In this disease, the nerve-insulating myelin of a person's body comes under attack when the body's own defensive immune system no longer recognizes it and takes it for an intruder. The cause is still unknown, but certain environmental triggers and perhaps a virus could be contributing factors.

My mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 13 years ago. My mother unfortunately has a progressive disease course, in which the symptoms worsen as time goes on. She has been through too many hospital visits to count anymore. I was very young when her illness began, and my lifestyle has been one of support for my mother ever since. Supporting a parent with multiple sclerosis is a difficult process. MS affects its victims physically, psychologically, and socially, and for each of these types of effect, family members must learn to cope in different ways.

(Dianna Sholey, Pueblo Community College student)

14. Vivid Contrast

In the early '70s we were hip and cool and groovy, wearing our bell-bottom pants, beads, moccasins, and tie-dyed shirts with our long, straight hair parted in the middle and our un-made-up faces casually surveying the scene. Jefferson Airplane and the Mamas and the Papas were our idols and rum and coke our first experiment with drinking. Today my daughter, a teen of the 21st century, is “scene,” clad in her tight capris, her clogs, and her short T-shirt, exposing her pierced belly button and her barbed-wire arm tattoos. Her clipped, blackened hair stands straight up in unmoving defiance of any authority. Tupac and 2 Live Crew are her music favorites and Coronas her choice of drink. It might first appear that the two generations have nothing in common except the strangeness, but so much of my daughter’s behavior reminds me of myself 30 years ago that I don’t feel at all anxious about her weird lifestyle. In truth, although generations may seem miles apart, their similarities are more than they care to admit.

(Isabella Melecio, Pueblo Community College student)

15. Writer’s Experience with the Subject

Let me start with a confession. I am addicted to soap operas. From the minute I get up until it’s time to go to bed, I think about my favorite characters. At work I recount the scenes of the latest episodes and try to think of better solutions to my favorite characters’ many problems. Even my job schedule is planned around the hours of my favorite soaps. My family has accepted my addiction and prefers not to discuss it; my friends think that I’ve gone insane; I, however, have come to realize that there are millions of people throughout the world who share this addiction. After much analysis and research, I have come to understand that soap operas can serve three special purposes for so many people: entertainment, a way to live life vicariously, and an excuse to isolate ourselves from what we can’t or don’t dare change.

(Author unknown)

