

Writing Handout W-4:

Writing an Effective Introduction

The introductory paragraph is the first paragraph of a paper. Its purpose is to be so inviting that the reader will not want to stop reading. In most college papers, this introductory paragraph contains a thesis statement (see ASC Handout W2).

Attention-Getting Devices

The first several sentences of an introductory paragraph should consist of attention-getting or interesting sentences. Following are a few examples of techniques that may be used to lead the reader to the thesis statement (in italics), which is usually the final one or two sentences of the introductory paragraph.

Narration

Buffalo Bill Cody, a legendary showman, never ran out of ways to attract the interest of his audience. His flair for the dramatic included transforming his own experiences into folklore of the West that remains today. According to some accounts, Cody even added a chapter to his legend during a break from his Wild West show when he became involved in a duel with Yellow Hair, a Cheyenne Indian chief. According to Cody, he shot the chief, then stabbed him in the heart, and finally scalped him. Other accounts describe the encounter as hand-to-hand combat. Although no one can be sure of what actually occurred, the event became an exciting act in Cody's show. *Cody proved that, in addition to his western exploits, he was a theatrical genius who knew how to captivate his spectators.* In addition to touring the East, he excited European audiences with his dramatizations of the Old West, entertained them with staged gun battles, and stimulated their imaginations.

Factual Data or Statistics

Buffalo Bill Cody, the great American showman and western hero, was born in Iowa in 1846. His adventurous early life included stints as a prospector, Pony Express rider, and cavalry scout during the Indian Wars. He also served as a Union scout during the Civil War and in 1867 earned his nickname by hunting buffalo to help feed workers who were building railroads to the West. Cody's true talent, however, was an ability to transform his experiences into his exciting Wild West show that enthralled eastern and European audiences during the 1870s and 1880s. *Cody proved that, in addition to his western exploits, he was a theatrical genius who knew how to captivate his spectators.* He excited audiences with his dramatizations of the Old West, entertained them with staged gun battles, and stimulated their imaginations.

Quotation

Buffalo Bill Cody once said, "I decided to bring the West to the East through the medium of the Wild West show." However, this great American showman accomplished more than simply bringing "the West to the East." His transformed his own exciting experiences into thrilling performances that enthralled eastern U.S. and European audiences. *Cody proved that, in addition to his western exploits, he was a theatrical genius who knew how to captivate his spectators.* He delighted audiences with his dramatizations of the Old West, entertained them with staged gun battles, and stimulated their imaginations.

Startling Statement

During a break from touring the East with his Wild West show, Buffalo Bill Cody once engaged in a duel with a Cheyenne Indian chief, Yellow Hair. According to Cody, he shot the chief with a rifle, stabbed the Indian in the heart, and finally scalped him. Other accounts describe the encounter as hand-to-hand combat. Although no one can be sure of what actually occurred, the event became an exciting act in Cody's show. *Cody proved that, in addition to his other achievements as a scout and hunter, he was a theatrical genius who knew how to captivate his spectators.* Cody excited audiences with his dramatizations of the Old West, entertained them with staged gun battles, and stimulated their imaginations.

General Statements

William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody was an American adventurer, buffalo hunter, and showman. He was born in Iowa in 1846, and his early life included stints as a prospector, Pony Express rider, and cavalry scout in the Indian Wars. He also served as a Union scout during the Civil War and in 1867 earned his nickname by hunting buffalo to help feed workers who were building railroads to the West. His true talent, however, proved to be an ability to transform his experiences into his exciting Wild West show that enthralled audiences during the 1870s and 1880s. Ultimately, he became famous for the shows he organized with wild-west themes, and he toured in Europe as well as the United States. *Cody proved that, in addition to his other achievements, he was a theatrical genius who knew how to enthrall an audience.*

What Not to Say in Your Introduction

1. Avoid telling the reader that you are beginning your paper:

In this essay, I will discuss . . .
I will talk about . . .
I am going to prove . . .
2. Do not refer to later parts of your paper:

By the end of this essay one will agree . . .
In the next paragraph people will see . . .
3. Do not make your introduction too long. This paragraph usually needs about half as many sentences as your body paragraphs. (The length of the introduction may vary in proportion to the length of the essay. A long 2,000 word research paper may require a longer introduction.)
4. Do not use a dictionary or encyclopedia definition as an introduction.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary . . .
Wikipedia describes . . .
5. Do not pad your introduction with irrelevant information.
6. Do not use second-person (you) in the introduction or anywhere else in the paper.