

Introductions

Objective: To improve the introductory paragraph(s) in student writing.

Rationale: After being taught the basic five paragraph thesis form In seventh and eighth grade, It is time to start developing that basic form. First things first: the introduction needs to be enhanced.

Process: Class begins with students writing the introductory paragraph to a thesis paper either on an assigned topic or on their own choice. Discussion may begin with a partner, comparing and contrasting each introduction, or it may jump immediately to the large group.

1) "How did you or your partner start the piece?" Typical responses will be: ... with a question, or a quote, an anecdote, some onomatopoeia, a startling statistic, a direct quote from a novel/movie, etc. "All well and good, but also somewhat weak and often times boring. Not only is It common to start a piece that way, but it doesn't really grab the reader's attention and make the reader truly want to read your piece. What we are going to do today is learn some new options, and they all are forms of a lead."

2) Define lead: many possibilities but I use: **the attention getter and buffer sentences that lead up to the thesis statement.** The forms being taught come from creative writing where the lead is arguably the exposition of a novel. Barry Lane has a large section on leads in his *Writer's Toolbox* resource. This is wonderful because he has done all the hard work of organizing and collecting sample leads. I have used these samples in conjunction, with my own (both published and student samples) as I teach the six different possibilities.

3) Provide a sample. Included in this handout is the opening of John Sandford's *Mind Prey*.

4) Talk about the sample and why and how it does its job of grabbing the reader's attention. Discuss how much more fun it would be to also write this way versus a question.

5) Teach the six options that Barry Lane has developed:

- **snapshot:** use imagery to create a visual picture for the reader
- **talking:** use dialogue to engage the reader
- **immediate consideration of the subject:** jump right into the topic ["flashback": this is a related form depending upon the thesis where the piece can start at an earlier time and then jump to a more current context]

- **thinking:** use a character's/ person's thoughts to jump start the piece
- **misleading:** start out the piece one way and then shift it quickly
- **set up:** lay out the larger context of the piece

6) Have the students rewrite their introductions using one of these options.

Mind Prey

John Sandford

CHAPTER I

The storm blew up late in the afternoon, tight, gray clouds hustling over the lake like dirty, balled-up sweat socks spilling from a basket. A chilly wind knocked leaves from the elms, oaks, and maples at the water's edge. The white phlox and black-eyed Susans bowed their heads before it.

The end of summer; too soon.

John Mail walked down the floating dock at Irv's Boat Works, through the scents of premix gasoline, dead, drying minnows and moss, the old man trailing behind with his hands in the pockets of his worn gabardines. John Mail didn't know about old-style machinery -- chokes, priming bulbs, carburetors, all that. He knew diodes and resistors, the strengths of one chip and the weaknesses of another. But in Minnesota, boat lore is considered part of the genetic pattern: he had no trouble renting a fourteen-foot Lund with a 9.9 Johnson outboard. A driver's license and a twenty-dollar deposit were all he needed at Irv's.

Mail stepped down into the boat, and with an open hand wiped a film of water from the bench seat and sat down. Irv squatted beside the boat and showed him how to start the motor and kill it, how to steer it and accelerate. The lesson took thirty seconds. Then John Mail, with his cheap Zebco rod and reel and empty, red-plastic tackle box, put out on Lake Minnetonka.

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