

UGRC 110

Academic Writing

Session 8 – Writing Introductions

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Session Overview

- Your introduction gives first impression to your readers and assures them that your essay will be worth reading. From this, you will note that Introductions are crucial to understanding any piece of work that is properly done.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Section you should be able to

- note the importance of Introductions
- identify the parts of an Introduction
- write an Introduction to an essay

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- The Thesis Statement
- What is Thesis Statement
- Writing an Effective Thesis Statement
- The Position of the Thesis Statement
- A working thesis
- Other ways of starting the introduction

Reading List

- Read Chapter 5, Buscemi (2008) *A Reader For College Writers*, pp. 125-154



Topic One

THE THESIS STATEMENT



What is a Thesis Statement?

- A thesis statement contains the central idea or ideas that your essay seeks to develop. In a way, it can be likened to the topic sentence, which summarizes the central idea of a paragraph.
- Let us look at how the thesis statement in the following paragraph provides focus to the essay we are writing on the topic, “Should Ghana go HIPC?”:

*The term HIPC is translated to mean a Highly Indebted Poor Country. This term is applied to countries which have a huge foreign debt. Most countries with huge foreign debts are found in Africa, some parts of Asia and South America. Most often poor countries are also referred to as ‘Third World Countries’. It is the prerogative of a poor country to declare itself HIPC. Ghana is a Third World Country with a huge foreign debt, and of late, there has been this debate as to whether Ghana should declare itself HIPC or not. **Ghana has a lot to gain by declaring itself HIPC.***



What is a Thesis Statement?

- The sentence, written in boldface, shows the writer as having taken a stance on the topic under discussion. This is the thesis statement.
- This essay will therefore look at some areas of Ghanaian life in its argument that HIPC is good for Ghana. In other words, the thesis statement tells the reader what the essay will say and what it will not say and so acts as a check on the writer.
- The point is being made here is that an introductory paragraph has two main parts. These are the background information and the thesis statement, both of which are necessary to have a complete and an effective introduction.

Writing an Effective Thesis Statement

- Let us examine some examples of a clear and effective thesis statement.
- Our topic is 'The state of the Ghana Police Service today'. Let us assume that we have omitted the background information on this topic and the following is our thesis statement
 - **...The Police Service today is completely different from what it used to be.**
- Obviously this thesis statement has a lot to do with the topic but it does not tell us the nature of the change. It is therefore vague needs to be revised in order to specify the nature of the change. Consider the following revised version
 - ...The change in the Ghana Police Service comes especially with the entrance of university educated men and women into the Service to bring about efficiency.
 - You will observe from the above revised thesis statement that this is more specific in that we have 'efficiency' as an important factor as well as the entry of graduates which have effected the change.

Activity

- 1. Write an effective introduction to an essay on the topic, “The Role of the Media in Ghana’s Democracy”. Ensure that your introduction contains useful background information before the thesis statement.

Topic Two

THE POSITION OF THE THESIS STATEMENT



Positioning Thesis Statements

- Generally, the thesis statement comes towards the end of the end of the introduction, that is, after the background information has been presented.
- This order is effective because the background information sets the frame of reference within which the thesis statement is understood.
- With the thesis statement coming at the latter part of the introduction both the writer and the reader are focused on the issues to be developed in the next part of the essay, which is the body paragraphs.



A Working Thesis

- A thesis statement is not easily composed by beginning writers. So in order not to be stuck, you will have to adopt what is normally referred to as a working/tentative thesis statement.
- The working thesis statement will help you go ahead and develop your idea so that you are not affected by what is called writer's block; one's inability to continue writing an essay because one.
- After your essay has been drafted, you may consider revising your 'working thesis statement' for it to capture exactly what you have discussed in the essay, in order to have a clearer and therefore good thesis Statement.

Other Ways Of Starting An Introduction

- The essay written in the university environment is essentially to show scholarship and so if one sticks to one way of writing essays they may become boring and predictable.
- There is the need to vary the writing of our Introductions depending on the nature of the topic we are writing about.
- Some of these other ways of writing the introduction to an academic essay include:
 - Begin with a startling remark or statistics
 - Ask a question
 - Challenge a widely held assumption or opinion
 - Use an anecdote or describe a scene
 - Use an appropriate quotation
 - Explain key words in the topic for discussion

Other Ways Of Starting An Introduction

- These are but some of the ways of starting an essay before introducing the thesis statement.
- These other ways of writing Introductions are alternatives to the typical way of writing Introductions whereby you appeal to general knowledge that is relevant to understanding the specific idea expressed in the thesis statement.
- In the example below the background information comes before the thesis statement, which is underlined. The topic we want to discuss first is “The Effects of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Africa”:

It is estimated that every day 200 people get infected by the HIV virus in Ghana. Ghana is one of the countries in Africa with a low prevalence rate so one can imagine the case in countries with a high prevalence rate! HIV/AIDS pandemic has affected many African countries negatively by weakening their labour force, by rendering many children parentless, and by creating abject poverty.

- A reading of the above background information should be shocking enough if one hears this information for the first time. This is an example of using a startling remark to begin an essay.