**Writing an Essay**

*Read the information provided below thoroughly. Highlight, circle or underline key information to make them easier to find in your notes. Then complete the assignment attached.*

**Introductory Paragraphs**

**The introductory paragraph is the first-paragraph in the persuasive essay.** I teach my students that their introductory paragraphs should have three parts: an [attention-catcher](https://www.ereadingworksheets.com/writing/writing-persuasive-essays/#attention-catchers), a [thesis](https://www.ereadingworksheets.com/writing/writing-persuasive-essays/#thesis), and a [preview](https://www.ereadingworksheets.com/writing/writing-persuasive-essays/#preview-of-main-points). The introductory paragraph is perhaps the most important paragraph in the essay because it is the first and possibly last chance to make an impact on the reader. It should clearly express the subject of the essay as well as the writer’s position. While it is generally not required, previewing the main points shows readers that the paper has been thoughtfully composed rather than free formed. When I teach persuasive writing, we often devote the entire first week to the introductory paragraph because I believe that if a student can write a good introductory paragraph, then he or she can write a strong persuasive essay. Every introductory paragraph should begin with an attention catcher.

### Attention Catchers

**The attention catcher or lead should be the first sentence in the persuasive essay.** It is the writer’s first chance to make an impression on the reader, so it should not be spent thoughtlessly. A good attention catcher is angled in a way that immediately pushes the reader toward the writer’s position. Here is an example of what I mean:

**Example of a Weak Attention Catcher**

Do you think students should have to wear uniforms?

Notice that this question is open-ended and does not provide an opinion. If my students wrote this, I would not know which side they were arguing. This should not be the case. The writer’s position should be clear before they even mention it based on the strength of their attention catcher.

**Example of a Strong Attention Catcher**

Do you think students should be forced to wear pants when it is over 100 degrees?

This example is much stronger because the writer’s position is clear from the first line. They ask a question to which they already know the answer. Persuasion is about forcing others to think along your lines. Practice this in your writing by using attention catchers that are angled toward your position. It may take more time to write your attention catcher than any other sentence in your essay, but this is time well spent in my opinion.

#### Attention Catching Techniques

**Here is a short list of attention catching techniques for persuasive essays.** This list is not to be thought of as exhaustive, but rather as a few guiding examples to help you get started. I encourage you to combine and experiment with these techniques as your writing develops.

* **Asking a Question:** This is my favorite technique because it can be used on any topic at any time. Additionally, it has a strong rhetorical effect on readers: people are conditioned to think about questions because answers are often expected of them. When you ask a question in your paper, readers are more likely to consider your ideas. As with any attention catcher, you’ll want to take your time making a good one that begins persuading your audience immediately.
* **Quotation:** A wise person once said, “No matter what you’re trying to say, someone else has probably said it better.” I find that in most cases this statement is true. While you are unlikely to have access to the necessary resources to dig up quotes for a timed essay or standardized test, if you do have time (example: a high school application letter), using an appropriate quote is a classy way to start off your essay. Just be sure that the quote is connected to your topic in some easily identifiable way.
* **Anecdote:** An anecdote is a short story. Beginning your essay with an anecdote that is clearly related to your topic is another great way to get the reader’s attention and briefly demonstrate your descriptive writing ability. There are a couple things to keep in mind, however, when using an anecdote to catch the reader’s attention:
  1. **Stay on Point:** as with everything in your paper, your attention catcher, especially if it is an anecdote, should be related to your topic and position.
  2. **Stay on Mode:** Remember that you are writing a persuasive essay, not a narrative. Your anecdote should be limited to a few sentences, lest your writing may be perceived as off mode.
* **Startling Fact or Statistic:** Did you know that two out of three persuasive essays do not begin with a proper attention catcher? Using a startling fact or statistic is another great way to pique the reader’s interest, assuming that you can locate just such a fact. I’ve heard other people suggest that students should fabricate facts or statistics when other sources are unavailable, but I personally don’t support that approach, as it seems academically dishonest.
* **Imaginative Scenario:** Picture this! You have forty-five minutes to write an essay and you need an attention catcher fast. What do you do? One way to do this is to create an imaginative scenario such as the one that I just described. Immerse your reader in an example of the problem and show them why they should care. Use descriptive writing and sensory details to either positively or negatively charge your writing; however, as with telling anecdotes, be careful not to stray off mode. Remember that your main purpose is to write arguments not to tell stories.
* **Combinations:** You might find yourself using some hybrid of two or more of these techniques, which is completely acceptable. You can begin with an imaginative scenario and end with a question. Try something wild. When it comes to writing, the most restrictive limitations are the bounds of your own imagination. I encourage you to stretch those bindings whenever you have the opportunity.