

Paragraph Development Strategies for Introductions

There are number of patterns we see over and over again in introduction paragraphs. Some strategies are more effective than others, and some work well for a literary analysis but wouldn't be appropriate for a research essay. Here are a few.

Anecdote

An anecdote is short story or illustration related to the content of the essay that works to set up the thesis. In this case, Jinkyung illustrates her thought processes in this short story about what happens in her brain during class discussion.

Learning Language; Learning Culture

There was a hot discussion in my English class. The question was “what is intelligence?” The class had diverse ideas and were sitting in a circle engaged talking to each other. I was amazed by their original ideas. I agreed with many of their thoughts, but I had my own opinions and I wanted to participate in the discussion. In spite of my thoughtful ideas, I missed my chance to talk. Here is what was happening in my brain. I was listening to my peers, translating their English to Korean. I was thinking my thoughts in Korean, organizing my sentences in Korean, and then translating those to English. I have been in America for three years, studying and speaking in English. I study hard and have earned high scores on intelligence tests and my school work. Yet my speaking English still falters. Learning English has been a struggle, and not just a struggle of learning words, but a struggle of learning to join the conversation, and learning to join the culture.

—Jinkyung

Analogy

A writer can also use comparative or contrasting analogies to illustrate their core ideas. One writer described academic discourse as a dainty white glove and compared that to her own writing, which she imagined as a clunky mitten in her essay about college writing conventions.

Startling Statement

In an essay about why we need sex education a writer might start with some startling or surprising facts. For instance, did you know the phrase “popping her cherry” is a biologic impossibility? A fact like this would be sure to grab the reader's attention and gives the writer an idea to elaborate on as they set up the need for more scientifically actuate sex education.

Vivid Contrast

I might start an essay with a description of what I needed to do to write a research essay my first year of college, in 1992—go to the library, use the paper card catalog as well as the new computer databases, then wander all seven levels of the building to locate the paper copies of journals, and then return to the 2nd floor to make copies of the articles I found—and juxtapose that with what I would do today, which would be to log in to the online library at my campus and find everything I need digitally.

Background or Context

This strategy gives the reader whatever information—maybe historically or culturally or from the discipline—they need to understand the core argument of the essay. In the following two literary

analysis examples, Gayle and Shannon illustrate for the reader the psychological concepts they'll be using in the essay.

How Do I Love Me?

All relationships, whether they are rooted in love or merely friendship, need a good foundation upon which to build, and just as a home built on a weak foundation will wash away in the driving rains, the relationships that are built on weak underpinnings will also wash away during the trials of life. A strong individual cornerstone needed by those building a solid relational foundation is a healthy self-esteem, but unfortunately for some people a high regard for one's self is often taken to an unhealthy extreme because they suffer from a personality disorder which makes it nearly impossible for them to establish and maintain close relationships. Rob Fleming, of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, also has problems developing close bonds and while his strained relationships also include family and friends, it's the failed relationships of the female persuasion that are his primary focus as he spends an inordinate amount of his time dissecting and attempting to self-diagnose the reasons why those relationships failed. Unfortunately what Rob is unable to diagnose is that he suffers from a mental health disease called Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) which is the primary cause of his unsuccessful attempts at building strong interpersonal relationships.

—Gayle

Big Boys Do Cry

In today's society children are taught from birth that boys and girls have different expectations and roles they are required to play. Girls are the ones who are nurturing caregivers who take care of the home and children, while her husband is the strong supportive one who provides monetarily for his family. This has led to the sexist belief that girls are the ones who cry and are highly emotional, and boys are the strong and stable ones who show no emotion. If a boy does dare to show his emotion he is often ridiculed and called names or made to feel that he is inferior to other men which can lead many men to repress and deny their feelings. Rob Fleming, the main protagonist, is a perfect example of what happens when emotion is bottled up without release. As with most things in life, emotion will always find a way to come out one way or another. In Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, patriarchy has established societal expectations that have forced Rob to repress his emotions causing him to project his feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, and anger onto those around him, diminishing his own feelings of self-worth and the quality of his personal relationships.

—Shannon

Define a Key Concept

Although I never recommend students use a dictionary definition in their essays, sometimes it is necessary to define an idea or concept so the reader understands how the writer intends to use it. In this case, Faith defines hero so she can bounce her interpretation of the characters off of that definition.

The Real Hero

A literary hero is often a character admired for intelligence, bravery, strength as well as other extraordinary abilities. Many viewers of Edgar Wright's film, *Scott Pilgrim vs the World*, might identify Scott Pilgrim, the work's protagonist, as the hero. Yet while Pilgrim did encounter moments of growth, and

did engage in the majority of the battle scenes, he is not the true hero of the movie or the graphic novel that inspired it. Rather, the character who stands out as having gone through the hero's journey, and who embodies the most heroic traits, is Knives Chau. At first Chau may seem a trivial supporting character--the crazy ex-girlfriend to Scott Pilgrim's tortured man-boy--yet through her transformation process she proves to be the true hero of the work.

—Faith, English 300

Make a Personal Connection

Getting personal in an essay isn't always expected or necessary, but sometimes a writer's personal experience can illustrate key ideas and establish a relevance and credibility for the argument. Angelica explains her cultural background so contextualize her ideas about marriage, and Juana slips in a quick example about herself to give the reader the idea that she knows what she's talking about because she lived through it.

Love: The Foundation of Marriage

I am twenty-seven, married, and born into a Mexican-American family. Although I was born in America, I grew up in a culture where family means everything and traditions are taken seriously. I am a family girl at heart, and as such, marriage and children mean a great deal to me. I have known my husband for almost seven years, and we have been married two. Most people call this the "Honeymoon" phase, but believe me, this marriage has its ups and downs. Luckily for us, we experienced a lot of our hardships during our dating days, so we have figured out how to address our issues in a calm manner. In an excerpt from *Marriage, A History*, by Stephanie Coontz, she writes, "Whether it is valued or not, love is rarely seen as the main ingredient for marital success." However, as I understand it, love is one of the main building blocks in a marriage, and love should include respect, trust, and communication to maintain a stable and lasting marriage.

—Angelica

Empowerment of Sports in Adolescent Self-Concept

Every young adolescent struggles with his or her inner self. Who am I? What am I good at? Where do I belong? Self-concept is a recurring problem in Sherman Alexie's young adult graphic novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which tells the story of Spokane Indian Arnold's first year at an all-white rural high school off the reservation. This book demonstrates the power of sports in shaping young adults' self-concept. Parents often encourage children to play sports in order to find a physical outlet or to make friends. While sports did both of these things for me, they also helped me feel good about myself. When I was on the volleyball court, it didn't matter that I was poor and lived in a trailer, or that my clothes weren't from GAP; we were all put in an even playing field left with our own natural talents and efforts. Sports encourage and motivate kids to work hard be part of a group. In sports it doesn't matter the color of your skin or the state of your wallet: talent is talent, and hard work is hard work. Early in Sherman Alexie's novel, Arnold refers to himself as the Rez zero, but his experience off the reservation, on Reardan High School's basketball team, transforms his self-concept to something more positive.

—Juana