



The
Elegant
Essay
Student Book

Lesha Myers, M.Ed.

Third Edition, March 2011 Institute for Excellence in Writing, L.L.C.

Also by Lesha Myers:

The Elegant Essay: Building Blocks for Analytical Writing (Teacher's Manual)

Windows to the World: An Introduction to Literary Analysis

Writing Research Papers: The Essential Tools

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The Elegant Essay

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Table of Contents

Student Pages

Chapter 1: Overview	1
Chapter 2: Thesis Statements	7
Chapter 3: Essay Organization.....	15
Chapter 4: Transitions.....	29
Chapter 5: Introductions.....	35
Chapter 6: Conclusions	47
Chapter 7: Form Review	61
Chapter 8: Thesis & Outlines	69
Chapter 9: Descriptive Essay.....	85
Chapter 10: Persuasive Essay	95

Appendices

Appendix A: Teaching Models.....	109
Appendix B: Grading Sheets	121
Appendix C: IEW Essay Model & Style Techniques	141

Thank you!

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Foreword

In 2008, I was graced with the privilege of meeting Lesha Myers at the Writing Educator's Symposium in Murrieta, California. Attending her "Arts of Arguing" session, I marveled at her passion for teaching and her desire to help students and teachers excel in their writing efforts. Her superb courses, *The Elegant Essay* and *Windows to the World: An Introduction to Literary Analysis*, were blessings to my family and became proven resources for many families working on advanced writing instruction.

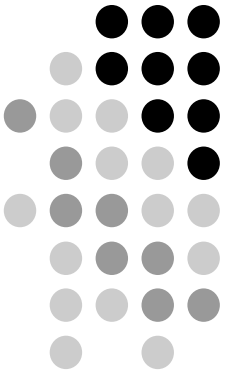
My students and I enjoyed getting to know Lesha through her fine work. In her warm, friendly writing style, Lesha reveals much of herself as she gently guides her reader through the processes necessary to craft words in essays and intelligently explore and write on literature. Additionally, the teaching tools she suggested have helped me become a better teacher across the curriculum.

In 2011, I was privileged to serve as Lesha's project manager for *Writing Research Papers: The Essential Tools*. As the book was coming close to publication, Lesha confided that she was battling against cancer. Facing the storm with exceptional courage, she desired to die well so as to glorify her Lord and Savior. She did. Instead of letting the disease dictate her days, she continued teaching until the end of the school year, expressing a strong and genuine faith to the many communities she served. Lesha passed from this life on June 29, 2012.

I am grateful for all that Lesha Myers has provided for teachers and young writers. I pray that you too will enjoy getting to know her as you study her materials. Throughout her books, Lesha often invites students to contact her and share what they are learning. Please do! To continue her legacy we have assembled a team of like-minded teachers to respond to your comments and questions. You may reach them using Lesha's email address: Lesha@excellenceinwriting.com.

Blessings,
Jill Pike
Accomplished Instructor with
The Institute for Excellence in Writing

5 INTRODUCTIONS



Openings

How do you decide whether or not to read an article? Do you read the first few sentences just to see if it's interesting? And if it's not, do you ever put it down? I know I do. There are so many words and so little time. I need to be selective. Of course, I read all of my students' compositions, and I enjoy helping writers master their craft. However, when I come across a well-written introduction that grabs my attention, I inwardly rejoice and look forward to reading on. You will have to exercise caution and consider your audience when you think about how you will introduce your essay. English teachers will probably like most of the techniques I'll present here, but you will need to use discernment when writing in other subject areas.

When you write your introduction, make it perform two functions:

- **Grab the reader's attention.** Your essay has to compete with hundreds for the reader's time. When you include some item of interest, sometimes called a *hook*, you hope to compel the reader to continue reading.
- **Introduce your limited topic** and give some idea of how you will handle it. This helps the reader bring any personal experience to the forefront of his memory, enabling him to interact with your thoughts and words.

Additionally, an introduction might give some definitions, especially for unfamiliar terms, offer attributions (book title and author) for a literary analysis, or present some background. Above all, it must provide a smooth transition to the main part of your paper.

Kinds of Introductions

Although many techniques can profitably introduce essays, writers generally use the following:

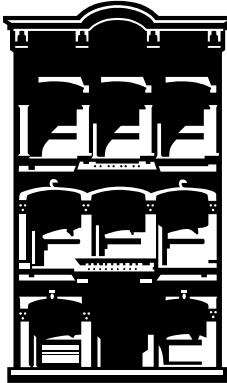
1. Give background and introduce the thesis (also called the *funnel*).
2. Ask a question.
3. Show a benefit to be gained.
4. Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.
5. Begin with a quotation or a familiar saying.
6. Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.
7. Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.

Examples of each of these techniques appear on the following pages.



Dramatic Openings

Sometimes you might want to write an opening to appear just before your “real” introduction. A dramatic opening serves to engage the reader and make him want to continue. Borrowing a technique from screenwriters, the dramatic opening begins in the middle of the action like a movie or television show. The paragraph following the dramatic introduction falls back and picks up the essay’s topic. Again, you will need to consider your audience when deciding whether or not to use a dramatic opening.



Like a façade, a dramatic opening gives your paper a “false front” to capture interest. The next paragraph can be a bit more sedate.

For example, the dramatic opening below served this student well in her essay on the mutualism between the fig plant and fig wasp, while the second paragraph introduced the topic and thesis (underlined). The student wrote this essay for her English class. Her science teacher might have felt compelled to note that fig wasps don’t think.

Suddenly a smell attracts the wasp. What is that smell? The wasp flies to investigate. Behold a fig tree, exactly what the mother wasp has been searching for. Flying through an opening on the plant, she sacrifices her wings, but she must get inside this fig. Even if it means her death, so be it. Searching, searching, then it appears. Spying a short style flower, she lays her eggs, then death consumes her. Her corpse rots away to nothing, but her children are safe and ready to enter adulthood when they hatch.

In the mutualism, or partnership, between a specific fig tree and its helper the fig wasp, neither creature can survive without the other. While the wasp needs a place to lay its eggs, the fig needs something to deliver pollen and provide it with nutrients so it can reproduce. In this specific partnership, neither the fig nor its helper can survive on its own because they need each other; they were designed to work together. (from “The Grave Story of the Fig Wasp” by Amber Myers)

Here’s another example of a dramatic opening. A few years ago I took a graduate level course from a university and studied how to teach students who were learning English. Frankly, I took a risk. I didn’t know my professor that well, and I didn’t know how this opening might be received. So, I followed it up with the dulllest and most boring paragraph I could muster. I even included the dreaded words, “this paper will” in my thesis statement, something I never allow my students to do. The technique worked, and I got an A.

There’s a war raging in California. Not in the streets or shores; it’s in the schools. Not in the hallways or cafeterias; it’s in the classrooms—the classrooms that teach English Language Learners. Presently, General Ron Unz holds the high ground after winning the Battle of Proposition 227 in 1998. However, the opposition, under the scattered leadership of Field Marshals Stephen Krashen and John Crawford, is marshalling its troops and seeking intelligence to overthrow the tyranny of sheltered English immersion and reinstate bilingual education. This war has already produced casualties: English Learners who finish their education unable to speak proficient English. Both sides blame the other for this travesty.

Prior to 1987, bilingual education was the law in California’s public schools. When this law sunsetted in 1987, Governor George Deukmejian vetoed an attempt to extend it; yet over the next 22 years, the California Department of Education all but mandated bilingual education. This changed in 1998 with the passage of Proposition 227. This paper will examine the changes wrought by that addition to California’s education code with an attempt to evaluate its effect on English Language Learners. (from “California’s Language Wars” by Lesha Myers)

Problems with Introductions

Omitting Them

The most common problem with introductions is omitting them. Beginning writers often just start their paper with their first body paragraph. In biographies, the first line of a younger student's report will invariably say something like, "George Washington was born in 1732." Although fine for a beginning writer, you're not a beginning writer.

Jumping the Gun

Another problem with introductions is what I call "jumping the gun." Students start writing their essay in their introduction, before they get to the body. Anxious to provide their evidence, students jump in and present their arguments, statistics, or other support. Remember, the introduction serves to provide background and a hook. It serves a taste of what is to come. It doesn't serve the whole meal.

Uh... Dull

The other common problem with introductions is they tend to be boring. Although parents and teachers have to read their students' essays, there's no need to make the process painful. By expending some effort, you can make your essay's entrance more enjoyable and maybe improve your grade.

Creativity

On the exercises that follow, you will have a chance to learn and practice each of the introductory techniques. I want you to have fun with this and be inventive. English teachers really like creativity, and there is not as much opportunity to be imaginative in an essay as there is in other types of writing—poetry or short stories for example. However, also keep in mind that your creativity has to underlie and serve your purpose in writing your essay—you can't be creative just to be creative—and that your introduction naturally has to lead into and support your thesis statement.

Cautions

- Although English teachers love creativity, teachers of other subjects (especially science) may not. Know your audience.
- Unless you are relating personal experience that supports your arguments, do not use "I" or its cousins (me, my, our, etc.) in any form in your essay. Especially avoid "I think" (Who else would be thinking?), "I am going to" (Just do it!), or any similar phrases.

Types of Introductions

Excerpt of an Example

(Please note: Although these are complete introductions, in essays they can be and usually are longer.)

Description

1. **Funnel .(Give background and introduce thesis.)**



The introduction that gives background and introduces the thesis is the most straightforward. Usually it begins generally, then funnels the reader toward the thesis statement, a one-sentence encapsulation of the entire essay. Many newspapers and magazine articles use this technique, sometimes answering the five W's and the H (who, what, where, why, when, and how). Although these leads can be somewhat dry, they quickly let readers know the subject and focus of the essay.

In the last several years, scientists have accomplished an amazing feat. They have mapped the entire human genome. While making way for medical advances that might benefit millions, scientists have stumbled on some rocky moral issues. Before scientists continue their research, those issues need to be addressed.

(Essay would continue by identifying the moral issues and possibly offering solutions.)

2. **Ask a question.**



By asking a question, writers hope to perk readers' interest in their essay so they will continue reading. They ask a question when they want readers to identify with the essay's concerns or focus on a specific problem. A carefully worded question will cause the reader to respond mentally, "Yes, I've always wondered about that." Be careful of questions with negative answers. For example, if an essay begins with the question, "Do you like spiders?" many readers might silently answer, "No," and quit reading. On the other hand, writers might use a question designed to narrow their audience. If the spider essay would only be of value to people who like spiders, the question would work well.

Old history books, popular opinion, and modern teachers all consider George Washington one of the greatest men of all time. They applaud his honesty by repeating the cherry tree story. They recount his heroic deeds, such as crossing the Delaware River in the dead of winter. They speak reverently of his faith and how he prayed for the Lord's blessing before battles. Who was this man really, and did he deserve all these accolades?

(Essay would examine George Washington's accomplishments and reach a positive or negative conclusion.)

3. **Show a benefit to be gained.**



Words surround modern readers. With so many options and so little time, readers need to be selective. Why should they spend time reading your essay? Introductions that dangle a benefit to be gained will appeal to readers, especially if they suffer from the particular problem you will discuss. They show the reader "what's in it for them" if they spend their time with your essay.

It takes only thirty minutes a day. It takes only thirty minutes to prolong your life, increase your stamina, and provide good health. Plus, remember all those clothes stuck way back in the closet, back where the light of day never shines? They will fit again. Save your money and your health. Begin to exercise for just thirty minutes each day.

(Essay would address the three topics: prolonging life, increasing stamina, and providing good health.)

Types of Introductions

Excerpt of an Example

(Please note: Although these are complete introductions, in essays they can be and usually are longer.)

Description

<p>4. <i>Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.</i> Ha Ha</p> <p>Most writing follows an expected path. Sentences build upon each other to reach some sort of logical conclusion. An effective introductory technique breaks this pattern by offering something unusual and perhaps breaking down some natural resistance to the subject.</p>	<p>Would you like to read a really great book? One that changes your life? That challenges your intellect? That rivets your attention? <u>Then don't read this one!</u></p> <p>(Essay would offer reasons to convince reader to bypass the book.)</p>
<p>5. <i>Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.</i> "To be? Or not to be?"</p> <p>Introductions need to meet a reader where he is and pull him into the essay. Sometimes a quotation or familiar saying will provide a meeting place. Examples include quotations from literature, Bible verses, proverbs, or excerpts from well-known speeches. Authors use this technique to build a bridge to their own topic.</p>	<p>The proverb says, "A fool and his money are soon parted." I should have thought of that before I fell for Larry's get-rich-quick scheme. Next time something sounds too good to be true, I'm going to remember, it probably is.</p> <p>(Essay might offer ways to identify and avoid an unwise business plan or offer suggestions for prudent investments.)</p>
<p>6. <i>Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.</i> “ ”</p> <p>In some ways related to technique five (above), this method repeats conversation. It might quote an actual conversation or create an imaginary one. It offers a friendly introduction to the essay's topics.</p>	<p>"Mom, I'm bored. Do you have anything I can do?" It sounded like an innocent question, but it started one of the greatest adventures of my life.</p> <p>(Essay could discuss any number of fulfilling activities such as a ministry to the homeless, a new business venture, or a new skill.)</p>
<p>7. <i>Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.</i> </p> <p>Readers enjoy stories. Essays that borrow elements of fictional writing can quickly capture readers' attention and gently lead them to more involved or controversial topics. The most effective essays that employ this introductory technique often return to it in the conclusion and finish the story. Humorous stories make this technique even more memorable.</p>	<p>As the announcer directed contestants to the starting line, I took a deep breath. Checking my shoelaces and running gear one last time, I confidently strode to my position. Although thousands of eyes watched me, I put them out of mind and asked the Lord for peace and stamina. Soon it was just me, the Lord, and the finish line.</p> <p>(Essay might relate a personal narrative or transition to another theme.)</p>

Notes

Use this page to take notes as your teacher directs.

Purpose & Function of Introductions

- 1.
- 2.

Kinds of Introductions

1. Funnel (background and thesis)
2. Ask a question
3. Show a benefit to be gained
4. Humorous, unexpected, or startling statement
5. Quotation or familiar saying
www.thinkexist.com " www.quotationspage.com " www.quoteland.com " www.brainyquote.com
6. Dialogue (real or imagined)
7. Anecdote (story)

Dramatic Openings and Closings

Potential Problems with Introductions

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Banned phrases:

"By reading this essay you . . ." or "I intend to show . . ." or "By way of introduction . . ." or "I . . ."

Introductions Modeling

1. Funnel

A Christian’s speech must glorify the Lord at all times. Grace should season each sentence. Sometimes, however, Christians face tough situations. Sometimes they need to warn or confront. Sometimes they need to turn conversations around. Above all, Christians need to use their time wisely and not over commit themselves. They must learn to say “no” graciously.

Directions: The above introduction gives some background and states the thesis. Rewrite it using each of the following introductory techniques, and try to include other style techniques you have learned. Since this is an exercise and since you cannot ask questions, you may take liberties by inventing some imaginative details. Of course, when writing actual essays, fabricating details would be highly unethical.

2. Ask a question.

3. Show a benefit to be gained.

4. **Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.**

5. **Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.**

6. **Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.**

7. **Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.**

Name: _____
Class: _____

Date: _____
Exercise 7: Introductory Techniques

1. Introduction

Local municipal gardens frequently search for volunteers to give tours of their facilities. In fact, the Bancroft Gardens in Walnut Creek will offer a training class next week. The eight-week program will equip docents to lead tours, identify plants and their origins, and use drought-tolerant plants in local gardens.

Directions: The above introduction gives some background and states the thesis. Rewrite it using each of the following introductory techniques, and try to include other style techniques you have learned. Since this is an exercise and since you cannot ask questions, you may take liberties by inventing some imaginative details. Of course, when writing actual essays, fabricating details would be highly unethical.

2. Ask a question.

3. Show a benefit to be gained.



4. **Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.**

5. **Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.**

6. **Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.**

7. **Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.**

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 8: Introductory Techniques

1. Introduction

Inventions litter history and arose from necessity. Inventors saw a problem and devised a solution. The monks of the Middle Ages had a problem. To fulfill the obligation of Psalm 63:6, “When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches,” they needed a reliable way to awaken each night for monastic prayers. That necessity led to one of the greatest inventions of all time: the medieval mechanical clock. Now clocks are everywhere. Providing a reliable way to tell time, clocks drastically impact society and all of life.

Directions: The above introduction gives some background and states the thesis. Rewrite it using each of the following introductory techniques, and try to include other style techniques you have learned. Since this is an exercise and since you cannot ask questions, you may take liberties by inventing some imaginative details. Of course, when writing actual essays, fabricating details would be highly unethical.

2. Ask a question.

3. Show a benefit to be gained.



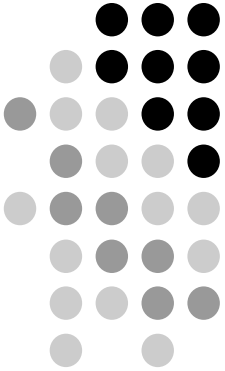
4. **Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.**

5. **Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.**

6. **Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.**

7. **Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.**

APPENDIX A



Teaching Models

Were you sick the day the teacher went over a particular model? Or were you present but a little out-of-it? Or did you miss a couple of things?

Never fear.

Models for all elegant essay lessons follow.

Sample



Chapter 5—Introductions Models

1. Funnel.

A Christian’s speech must glorify the Lord at all times. Grace should season each sentence. Sometimes, however, Christians face tough situations. Sometimes they need to warn or confront. Sometimes they need to turn conversations around. Above all, Christians need to use their time wisely and not overcommit themselves. They must learn to say “no” graciously.

Directions: The above introduction gives some background and states the thesis. Rewrite it using each of the following introductory techniques, and try to include other style techniques you have learned.

2. Ask a question.

Have you ever wanted to remove your foot from your mouth? Do you wish you could speak more kindly to others? Does your speech glorify God and show His love? As Christians, we are called to lead a life pleasing to God. This includes our speech. We must learn to speak courteously, exhort each other kindly, and say “no” graciously. (Samara Meahan)

3. Show a benefit to be gained.

Christians have many opportunities to be godly examples to unbelievers. By taking heed of how we talk, we, as Christians, can control the conversations we are in. It is always important to be gracious no matter what. If we are talking to someone and they are not glorifying God, it is our responsibility to turn the conversation around. We must be able and willing to say “no” graciously. (Phoebe Pelot)

4. Begin with an unexpected, humorous, or startling statement.

Mark Twain said, “It is better to keep your mouth shut and be taken for a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.” When we learn to control our tongues, we will not look, sound, or act like a fool. We will also be able to warn and confront, turn the conversation around when needed, and say “no” graciously. (Samara Meahan)

5. Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.

Just say “no,” but make sure that you say it graciously. Christians need to learn to treat people kindly and with respect. However, they also must learn to politely decline requests and not overcommit themselves. A Christian’s speech should glorify the Lord at all times and grace ought to season each sentence they speak. Sometimes Christians face tough situations and must warn or confront. At other times they must change the subject to be sure that their conversations are pleasing to God. (Emily Turner)

6. Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.

“Susie, you don’t have time for another class! You’re already taking gymnastics, piano, and tennis. You just don’t have enough time in your day for all that you want to do.”

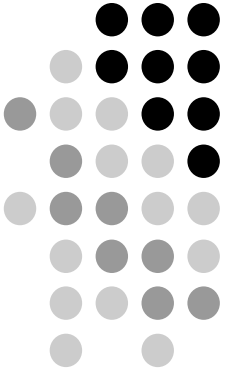
“But Mom, I already said yes. It’s not that I really want another commitment, I just couldn’t say no. What can I do?”

Have you ever been stuck in a situation like Susie? Then perhaps you need to learn to say “no” graciously. (Brianna Swanson)

7. Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.

A lady sits on the sofa. Her head droops like a wilted flower. Her shoulders shake with suppressed sobs. “I can handle it! I can handle it!” she cries over and over to her cat. Had this lady learned to say no graciously, she wouldn’t be teaching Sunday school, filling in at the nursery for someone who is sick, providing special music, and doing her regular nursery turn during the evening service. She needs to learn to say “no” graciously.

APPENDIX B



Grading Sheets



How do you know if you are doing well on the elegant essay exercises?

Checklists and reminders follow.

Sample

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Score Sheet

Course Score Sheet for Checklist Method

Assignment	Date Turned In	Score	Possible	Comments
Exercises				
Exercise 2			40	
Exercise 4a			50	
Exercise 4b			40	
Exercise 6			40	
Exercise 8			40	
Exercise 11			40	
Exercise 13			50	
Exercise 15			20	
Essays				
Desc. Draft			95	
Desc. Final			100	
Pers. Draft			95	
Pers. Final			100	
Quizzes				
Quiz #1			10	
Quiz #2			10	
Quiz #3			10	
Quiz #4			10	
Quiz #5			10	
Quiz #6			10	
Total				
			770	

A range: 693 - 770; B range: 616 - 692; C range: 539 - 615; D range: 462 - 538

Name: _____
Class: _____

Date: _____
Chapter 5

Introductions Grading Sheet

Exercise 8

Checklist

- Rewrite the entire introductory paragraph in the exercises rather than just tacking on another sentence, such as a question, startling statement, or quotation.
- Feel free to add style and change some of the words, especially the verbs.
- When adding creative details, be careful to not stray too far away from the original topic.
- Be sure dialogue or a startling statement connects with the rest of the introduction.
- Banned statements: Anything similar to “By reading this essay...” or “I intend to show...” or “By way of introduction. . . .”
- No “I” statements in the introduction: “I think,” “I believe,” others. Exception: If you are relating personal experience, “I” statements are fine.
- Make sure the introduction makes sense and uses appropriate transitions.

Structure

Question _____ 5

Benefit _____ 5

Startling or humorous statement _____ 5

Quotation or famous saying _____ 5

Dialogue _____ 5

Description _____ 5

Style

Introductions exhibit varied syntax (variety of sentence openers and construction), diction (word choices), and flair (dress-ups and decorations).

_____ 5

Mechanics

Fewer than 3 grammar/spelling/punctuation errors on exercise.

(If fewer than 3 errors, give the full 5 points. Deduct 1 point for each error over 3. If more than 8 errors, give the student a zero.)

_____ 5

Total _____ 40

Optional Pop Quiz

_____ 10