

The Art of Introduction

The introduction of a paper sets the reader up for what they are about to read. The following nine strategies are some of many ways to introduce a paper. The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy will be used as the topic for the example paragraphs.

Begin with a quotation

Start with an interesting and relevant quote about your topic to catch the reader's attention. The person you're quoting should be a relatively well-known person of interest or expert of the topic you're discussing.

Example:

Mark Twain once said, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." People who are more willing to accept aging rather than focusing on a number tend to lead happier lives. This is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy which is the idea that what people believe sometimes affects what actually happens. If you believe that your life will get better as you get older, it just might happen.

Begin with a concession

A concession is used in argumentative writing where you acknowledge a point made by the opposing side but then explain why yours is better. With this introduction, it is shown that self-fulfilling prophecy won't work in impossible situations like successful brain surgery by a complete amateur, however, the concept still has power in the outcome of certain situations.

Example:

Telling yourself that you can perform brain surgery when you didn't finish ninth grade might not work, but your expectations in some situations can affect their outcome. If you believe that you will have a good time at a party-no matter what-you probably will. If you believe the opposite, that mindset might just become reality instead. This phenomenon is known as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Begin with a paradox

A paradox is a self-contradictory statement that is found to actually be true. Using a paradox in your introduction will get your reader thinking about the intriguing complexity of your topic. This particular introduction shows the reader that the problem is actually a solution as well.

Example:

Women who are still single-but not by choice-in their later years might have a self-fulfilling prophecy to blame. The anxieties and fears about never finding the right one might affect their behavior in social situations so that they will not end up interacting with potential mates. The cure to this problem is using a self-fulfilling prophecy to your advantage. That's the idea behind books like "The Secret" that encourage visualization to help get what you want out of life

Begin with a short anecdote or narrative

An anecdote or narrative is a story about your topic that gives an illustration of the concept or point you will be talking about before you start explaining it. Therefore, when the concept is introduced, the readers can relate the explanation back to the narrative.

Example:

I sat impatiently in the small waiting room with sweat forming around my forehead. This was my first job interview and I had no idea what to expect. I reminded myself that I fulfilled all the education requirements and could do the job. This however, didn't keep me from feeling insecure. I tried to avoid all eye contact with the other well-dressed applicants in the room. How did they seem so confident and put-together? Did I stand any chance against them for this position? I sneaked a glance at the woman's resume who was sitting next to me. The achievements and experience just kept going, how could I possibly compete with her? I sat there devastated, already given up all hope. All of a sudden, the door opened and my name was called. I slowly stood and forced my weak legs to walk over. I gave a weak smile and wet handshake, and then accepted my fate. In the end, I did not get the job. This is an example of a concept called self-fulfilling prophecy-an idea that your expectation of the situation affect its outcome. In this case, my defeated attitude kept me from performing well in my first job interview.

Begin with an interesting fact or statistic

An interesting fact or statistic may hook the reader. It might also get them to see the topic in a new light. Maybe they didn't know that aspect of the topic before, or maybe they hadn't realized how widespread the topic was. Note: use facts or statistics sparingly because they can and are easily overused.

Example:

In a drug trial for lupus medication, 43.6 percent of patients taking the placebo showed a positive response. Placebos are usually empty capsules or sugar pills. The fact that the patents believe that they will get better from the medication is what ends up making them better with the placebo. This is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy which is the idea that expectations influence results.

Begin with a question

In an informative paper, this strategy might be the way to get the reader thinking about your topic. They may already have some of these questions and that might tempt them into reading further to hear the answers. Remember that when using this strategy, you must answer the questions in the paper, possibly even setting up the main points of the body with them. Note: in a persuasive paper, this may not be the strongest way to set up an argument as the reader might have answered the questions for themselves before even reading your argument.

Example:

How can what you believe affect what happens? Why do so many patients in drug trials report positive results from sugar pills alone? How can you use your expectation to give yourself a better life?

Begin with relevant background material

Giving a brief history of your topic might be a good way to introduce it and might help the reader to better understand it. Only use this if it relates and is important to the topic. Otherwise, it can detract from your paper. This example sets up the origin of the concept and how the modern day idea differs slightly.

Example:

The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy or the Pygmalion effect comes from Greek mythology. The story goes that a prince named Pygmalion creates an ivory statue of the ideal woman whom he ends up falling in love with. He prays to Venus for his love to become real. She does and they end up living happily ever after. The modern concept, though a bit different, involves the idea that simply what you can believe can affect the outcome of situations.

Begin with an analogy

An analogy is essentially a comparison between two things. Typically, this is for clarification or explanation. In this example, the point of an analogy is to find similarities in possibly very different concepts in order to illustrate your point better.

Example:

If you're going to have a busy day, planning ahead and writing down those plans on your calendar may make you more likely to get everything done. Similarly, if you believe in advance that a situation will go well, that might help it go well. This is what's known as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Begin with a definition of a term that is important to your essay

This idea is often manifested by something along the lines of “According to Webster’s Dictionary”-but it’s best to write more of an extended definition that shows how the word is related to your topic. The paragraph below gives the definition for an aspect of the concept being used as the topic. It lays the foundation for the paper to build upon the topic in the readers’ minds.

Example:

To test the effectiveness of types of therapy or medications, people-like drug companies-must check the results against the placebo effect. The placebo effect is when a patient believes they are getting treatment that will improve their health, so they end up getting better without actual effective treatments. The prominence of this effect demonstrates how powerful the mind is in affecting the outside world. The placebo effect is an example of self-fulfilling prophecy which is the idea that what you believe will happen, might affect what actually happens.