

## Essay bootcamp

### How to write a hook for your introduction

You want to start your essay with an effective hook. You can do so in 1 of four ways: 1) using a quote pertinent to your topic; 2) using an anecdote (story) that relates to your topic; 3) citing an interesting fact or statistic; or 4) posing a thoughtful question. If you use a question as a hook, avoid questions that start with “Have you ever wondered why . . .” or “Did you know that . . .” They are weak and don’t pique the reader’s curiosity.

Good examples:

- *What is the difference between successful college students and unsuccessful college students?*
- *Almost two-thirds of American adults at some point in their life have lived in a home with at least one gun.*
- *Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”*

Poor Examples:

- *Have you ever wondered why the Constitution contains a Bill of Rights?*
- *There are many problems with Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal policy.*
- *In my opinion, the Constitution needs a 28th Amendment establishing a right to basic food, health care, and shelter.*

Exercise: Please find a quote, fact, or anecdote for the following topics and write a hook for each. Your topics are 1) Were the Crusades about preserving the freedom of Christians against Muslim invaders or an example of Christian tyranny?; 2) Was Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Policy an example of tyranny or an example of progress that helped America evolve?

Hook 1:

Hook 2:

### How to write a thesis statement

A thesis statement is the road map for your essay. It contains three elements: 1) a summary of your topic; 2) an answer to the question presented and/or a stand on the issue presented; 3) a couple of key points that help establish your position. These key points usually come directly from the topics of your body paragraphs.

Good examples:

- *School uniforms may be an upfront cost for families, but they eradicate the visual differences in income between students and provide a more egalitarian atmosphere at school.*
- *Heavily taxing and increasing the price of cigarettes is essentially a tax on the poorest Americans, and it doesn't deter them from purchasing. Instead, the state and federal governments should target those economically disenfranchised with early education about the dangers of smoking.*

Poor Examples:

- *The Crusades could be either seen as a power grab by Christians or a defense against Muslim tyranny.*
- *Andrew Jackson was a bad President for a number of reasons.*

Exercise: Write thesis statements for the following topics.

Topic 1: Assume you are writing a paper on the topic "Was Andrew Jackson a President that helped expand the prestige and influence of America or was he an example of an uninformed electorate that was swayed by popular opinion and not reason?" Your position is that Andrew Jackson was elected by an uninformed electorate. Your body paragraphs will discuss how Jackson was elected with very little experience, relied on his heroics as a general to get elected, and he played on voters' fears of corruption.

Your thesis statement for topic #1:

Topic 2: Were the Great Compromise and 3/5 Compromise necessary to the passage of the Constitution? You take the position that they were. Your two body paragraphs will show that small states objected to the Virginia Plan and slave states objected to any plan that failed to count slaves as 1 full person for determining representation.

Your thesis statement for topic #2:

**How to write a topic sentence**

You should not begin a paragraph with one of your specific points. Instead, use a topic sentence. The topic sentence is the road map for the paragraph. It tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. It should contain both the topic and a controlling idea, the direction the paragraph will take.

Good Examples:

- *There are many reasons why pollution in Mumbai is among the worst in the world, including lack of pollution controls and too many cars.*

The topic is "pollution in Mumbai is the worst in the world" and the controlling idea is "many reasons" including "lack of pollution controls and too many cars."

- *To be an effective CEO requires certain characteristics such as leadership and vision.*

The topic is "To be an effective CEO" and the controlling idea is "certain characteristics such as leadership and vision."

Poor Examples:

- *This paragraph will be about the leadership of Union Civil War Generals.*

- *General McClellan was too indecisive at the Battle of Antietam.*

This sentence starts the paragraph off with a specific example instead of a broader roadmap.

Exercise: Write a sample topic sentence. Your paragraph is about how the 3/5 Compromise was necessary to the passage of the Constitution. You will argue that southern states would not have ratified the Constitution without its inclusion and wanted slaves to count as 1 full citizen when counting population.

Topic Sentence #1:

### **How to write complete sentence without it being a run-on or fragment**

Fragments: Sentences need to have a subject and a verb and have a complete thought to be a complete sentence. Sentences that start with Although, Which, Even though, Because, etc., must have a second thought to complete the sentence. For instance, although something occurs, something else must exist or occur to complete the thought. If you have a sentence that only has half of the required elements, then it is a dependent clause. Think of it as a codependent boyfriend or girlfriend. These clauses do not like hanging out by themselves and need the company of someone else to coexist happily.

Poor Example:

- President Jackson's push to remove the 5 Civilized tribes from the southeastern U.S. killed many Native Americans. Which is a terrible result.

Good Example:

- President Jackson's push to remove the 5 Civilized tribes from the southeastern U.S. killed many Native Americans which is a terrible result.

Exercise: Rewrite the following sentences:

1. Johnny goes rollerblading a lot. Because Johnny likes going to the emergency room.
2. The U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of speech. Which is a good thing since I like speaking my mind.

Run-ons: Sometimes sentences are compound; they have two or more complete thoughts joined together. Such sentences need to have proper punctuation joining them together. If they don't, a run-on sentence is created and you want to avoid those. Run-ons are most commonly created when a comma is used without a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but) or the necessary punctuation is missing entirely.

Poor Examples:

- A dog ran into the street and it chased its tail.
- Politicians have their campaigns funded by murky third-party donors, these donors often do not have to disclose their identity.

Proper examples:

- A dog ran into the street, and it chased its tail.
- Politicians have their campaigns funded by murky third-party donors, *but* these donors often do not have to disclose their identity.

Exercise: Rewrite the following sentences to avoid the run-ons:

Sentence 1: The Democratic Party has its roots in the South and that includes the stain of its segregationist past this includes figures like George Wallace.

Sentence 2: Sam stole three dollars from Billy, he then bought a candy bar with the money he gave it to Sally as a gift.

## How to introduce a quote or other evidence and provide analysis for it

When quoting a source for class, you need more than just quotation marks. A good quote needs to be introduced and connected to your claim or argument within your writing. In particular, when using quotes, you should use the C-QIC method:

**C - Context:** A quote should never be given on its own. You need to introduce your quote (or paraphrased information) so that it has some context. Usually, you can do this by providing the author's name or the article it came from. Generally, I caution against putting the article titles in the text because it breaks up the flow of your writing so I prefer to use just the author's name. This introduction could also inform the reader of the source of the information provided such as a study, poll, law review article, etc.

Example #1: *As John F. Kennedy declared in his inaugural address, “. . .”*

Example #2: *Pericles, a leader of Athenian Democracy in Ancient Greece, stated, “. . .*

Example #3: *In a study of schools nationwide, the Brookings Institution reported that social studies instructors were “twice as likely as other types of instructors to have coaching assignments.”*

**Qu - Quote:** When quoting, you should use quotation marks to indicate what someone else has said. Note the closing quote marks go outside the period.

Example: John F. Kennedy declared in his inaugural address, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

**I - Interpret:** When using a quote as evidence, you must always interpret the quote for the reader. The quote is not self explanatory! As a result, you must say what the quote means in your own words. Don't just leave it hanging without further explanation.

Poor example:

Presidents often inspire people to greatness. “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

Good example:

- In his inauguration address, JFK instructed, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” JFK challenged Americans to give back to their country, not just take from it.
- Pericles, in his “Funeral Oration” in 431 BCE states, “Election to public office is made on the basis of ability, not on the basis of membership to a particular class.” His statement suggests that anyone, regardless of class, can have power in government.

**C - Connect:** Finally, you should always connect your quote or evidence to your thesis or argument. In other words, you need to explain how the evidence supports your claim.

Example: Assume I’m writing a paper on Greek democracy, and my thesis is: Pericles made Athens one of the greatest examples of democracy in history. Here’s how I would connect the following quote:

Pericles, in his “Funeral Oration” in 431 BCE states, “Election to public office is made on the basis of ability, not on the basis of membership to a particular class.” His statement suggests that anyone, regardless of class, can have power in government. This shows how inclusive the Athenian democracy was at the time.

Exercise:

Your claim: The Great Compromise was important to passage of the Constitution.

Your quote: Constitutional Delegate, David Brearley of New Jersey, stated in response to the Virginia Plan: “The large states will carry everything before them, and the small states, like Georgia, will be obliged to throw themselves constantly into the scale of some large one in order to have any weight at all.”

Use C-QuIC connecting your quote to your claim or evidence:

**In-text citation:**

Every time you provide information from a source that is not common knowledge, you need to provide the source of that information in a parenthetical short cite. This is true not just for quotes but paraphrased information as well. That short cite is either the author’s last name and page number (if applicable) or the article title and page number if there is not an author. The cite goes in parentheses after the quotation mark or information and is followed by the period.

Poor example:

- After signing an uninspiring quarterback in free agency, the Rattlers GM stated, “Quarterbacks are a dime a dozen. I can find them growing on trees.”

Good Example:

- After signing an uninspiring quarterback in free agency, the Rattlers GM stated, “Quarterbacks are a dime a dozen. I can find them growing on trees” (Smith 24).

Exercise:

Provide short cites for the following:

Short Cite 1:

The Constitution was debated for 4 months in Philadelphia in 1787. Carol Berkin stated, “There was no more powerful a statement of modern governmental principles than those produced by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention.” This quote came from Carol Berkin, “The Glory of the Constitutional Convention,” 84 J. Am. Hist. 1216, 1218 (2016). Note 84 is the volume number of the journal, 1216 is the first page of the article, and 1218 is the page number where this quote could be found.

Short cite 2:

The Byzantine Empire had at its heart the city of Constantinople. John Green, a noted historian, stated, “The city of Constantinople is one of the modern wonders of the world and is a blend of Christianity and Islam.” This quote came from John Green, “The Dual Glory of Constantinople,” PBS.org, July 13, 2017, <http://pbs.org/dual-glory-constantinople>. Page 83.

## **MLA format**

MLA format requires a paper to be as follows:

- double spaced,
- typed in 12 pt Times New Roman font,
- have a header in the upper left corner of the first page with your name, class, teacher, and date,
- a title centered on the page,
- have parenthetical short cites in the text each time you refer to information that is not common knowledge like stats and quotes,
- your sources in a works cited page, and
- page numbers with your last name and the page number in a header in the upper right corner.

Exercise: Check your essay and make sure it complies with these formatting requirements. Fix those things that do not comply.

### **How to write a good title**

Your title should not be generic like “1st semester US history essay.” It should be specific to your topic such that the reader instantly knows what the topic will be about.

Poor examples:

- Three paragraph essay
- Slavery
- The Bill of Rights

Good examples:

- Why the Great Compromise and 3/5 Compromise were Necessary to the Passage of the Constitution
- How the Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation Were Fixed by the Constitution

Exercise: Write titles for the following papers. One is about the Declaration of Independence and the phrase “all men are created equal.” You believe it is a good ideal to aspire to even though the Framers did not always live up to it. The second paper is about slavery and how the cotton gin helped perpetuate it in the 1800s.

Title #1

Title #2