

Introductions for Essays

Part I. Background Information

Lesson Title: Introductions

English B, sections 6188 (3:45 to 5:50) and 6190 (6:00 to 8:05): The population (26 students) consisted of two cohorts of John Wietting's English B students (12 young adult students in section 6188—5 African-Americans, 5 Hispanics, 3 Asians, and 1 Caucasian; 14 older adult students in section 6190—2 African Americans, 9 Hispanics, 2 Caucasians, and 1 Asian). The lessons were taught on November 21, the day before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Name of Author: John Wietting, Fall 2007

Rationale for this study: Since the classes had just begun to study full essays, it seemed appropriate to address introductions for the lesson collaboration project.

Abstract:

Purpose and Methodology: Students were first informed of the project, its purpose, and its anticipated outcomes. Asked to participate, all students consented. Given a 5" x 8" index card, students copied the essential question (Section 6188, *What is necessary to put into an introductory paragraph and why?*; Section 6190, *What would you put into an introduction that would tempt your reader to want to select your essay to read?*) and were told to use the card later in the class to write the introduction to their essay. Next, from a series of predetermined questions about introductions the class discussed the purpose of introductions (*What is hard about getting started when writing an essay? What does a good introduction need? What kind of things would you put in it? How would you start off your essay?*). The class then studied 6 introductory methods from the textbook (Broad Statement, Contrast, Relevance, Anecdote, Questions, and Quotation). The class agreed an introduction should include an introductory method, thesis, and plan of development. In small groups, the students unscrambled a scrambled introduction. Finally, the students wrote their introductions on one side of the index cards and answered the essential question on the other. The instructor promised to return the index cards to the students at the next class.

Part II. The Lesson

Learning Outcome: Given an explanation and demonstration of introductory methods for an essay, students will be able to choose one method and construct an introductory paragraph.

Lesson Outline:

Phase 1.

A.

Essential Question: The instructor presents the lesson's essential question, which the students copy into their notes. The essential question epitomizes the content of the day's instruction. In addition, the instructor tells the students they will answer the question at the end of class (Susan Johnson, *Planning to Ensure Student Success*).

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B. General ideas: The instructor explains that the class will now be writing full essays. Heretofore, the class focused on body paragraphs. Next the class needs introductions, conclusions, and thesis statements. The instructor asks class discussion questions: What is hard about getting started when writing an essay? What does a good introduction need? What kind of things would you put in it? How would you start off your essay?

Phase 2. Lesson Steps

- A. The students learn that introductions get the reader's attention with introductory methods. Introductions end with a thesis statement, which may or may not have a plan of development.
- B. The instructor shows introduction examples from a handout or from a text. The class discusses the strategies in each.
- C. The class identifies the topic and thesis of the model paragraphs again. The instructor asks the students how the model paragraphs might be improved or presented in a different way.

Phase 3. Application

- A. Students reassemble an introduction from a scrambled paragraph.
- B. Using a sample writing prompt, the students construct their own introductions.

Phase 4. Collection

- A. The instructor reads over the introduction and offers advice for revision (if time allows).
- B. The students submit the introductions and responses to the essential question.

Part III. Results from the Lesson

- A. Results: In section 6188, all students completed the question and introduction tasks. Because the students finished at different times, the instructor read each card and, when necessary, offered assistance for revision. Three students had difficulty with their thesis statements and revised them. In addition, essential question responses indicated some confusion between the topic sentence and thesis. The instructor addressed this problem in the next class. In section 6190, all students completed both tasks, but the essential question responses addressed ideas behind the introduction, that is, the type of introductory method students chose and the necessity of the main idea. As with the previous class, several students (4) needed to revise their thesis statements.
- B. Dr. Johnson's Interactive Teaching Method: Her interactive approach provides clarity of lesson focus for the instructor and his/her students. Prior to the class, the instructor prepares a lesson plan template that includes four main parts: (1) Content Type (concept, procedure, law/principle); (2) Essential Question ("essential content"); (3) Learning Outcome ("Statement describing specific task by which students will transfer their understanding to a new context near the end of the lesson;" and (4) Lesson Phases which "contextualize new content and activate prior knowledge," "provide sufficient examples," "demonstrate each new content element to be learned," "insert 'Quick Thinks' as checks for understanding and as brief student engagement tasks," "allow students to practice in order to transfer their understanding to a new context," and allow students to "answer the Essential Question posed at start of lesson" Susan Johnson's Interactive Lesson Plan Template).

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- C. Findings: Dr. Johnston's Lesson Plan Method: The method proved successful and useful. For one, the students completed the assignment within the prescribed time limit and were ready to continue writing their essays. Second, the instructor immediately addressed the main confusion with the thesis statements rather than wait until the next class. Third, the instructor became aware of the general confusion between topic sentences and thesis statements and addressed it in the next class session. Finally, the different results from slightly varied essential questions underscore the importance of question clarity and purpose.

D. Recommendations:

- a. Dr. Johnston's Lesson Plan Method proved effective in this lesson. I plan to use the method for the two English A classes I am teaching in the spring. In addition, since students must keep a writer's notebook for these classes, I plan to make the essential questions and student responses to them part of their writing entries.
- b. As always when I've had the opportunity, I found that collaborating with another instructor who is teaching similar classes helpful and informative. In this project, I discovered that the English B instructor with whom I collaborated had similar experiences and problems with his students as I did with mine.

Part IV. Appendix

A. Introductions (John Langan's *English Skills with Readings*)

1. Broad Statement: In the course of working my way through school, I have taken many jobs I would rather forget. I have spent nine hours a day lifting heavy automobile and truck batteries off the end of an assembly belt. I have risked the loss of eyes and fingers working a punch press in a textile factory. I have served as a ward aide in a mental hospital, helping care for brain-damaged men who would break into violent fits at unexpected moments. But none of these jobs was as dreadful as my job in an apple plant. The work was physically hard; the pay was poor; and, most of all, the working conditions were dismal.
2. Contrast: When I was a girl, I never argued with my parents about differences between their attitudes and mine. My father would deliver his judgment on an issue, and that was usually the end of the matter. Discussion seldom changed his mind, and disagreement was not tolerated. But the situation is different with today's parents and children. My husband and I have to contend with radical differences between what our children think about a given situation and what we think about it. We have had disagreements with all three of our daughters, Stephanie, Diana, and Giselle.
3. Relevance: Almost all Americans are involved in sports in some way. They may play basketball or volleyball or go swimming or skiing. They may watch football or basketball games on the high school, college, or professional level. Sports may seem like an innocent pleasure, but it is important to look under the surface. In reality, sports have reached a point where they play too large a part in daily life. They take up too much media time, play to large a role in the raising of children, and give too much power and prestige to athletes.

4. Anecdote: The husky man pushes open the door of the bedroom and grins as he pulls out a .38 revolver. An elderly man wearing thin pajamas looks at him and whimpers. In a feeble effort at escape, the old man slides out of his bed and moves to the door of the room. The husky man, still grinning, blocks his way. With the face of a small, frightened animal, the old man looks up and whispers, “Oh, God, please don’t hurt me!” The grinning man then fires four times. The television movie cuts now to a soap commercial, but the scenes of direct violence on television must surely be harmful to children for a number of psychological reasons.
5. Questions: What would happen if we were totally honest with ourselves? Would we be able to stand the pain of giving up self-deception? Would the complete truth be too much for us to bear? Such questions will probably never be answered, for in everyday life we protect ourselves from the onslaught of too much reality. All of us cultivate defense mechanisms that prevent us from seeing, hearing, or feeling too much. Included among such defense mechanisms are rationalization, reaction formation, and substitution.
6. Quotation: “Evil, wrote Martin Buber, “is lack of direction.” In my school days as a fatherless boy, with a mother too confused by her own life to really care for me, I strayed down a number of dangerous paths. Before my eighteenth birthday, I had been a car thief, a burglar, and a drug dealer.

B. Scrambled introduction (From Susan Fawcett’s *Evergreen*.)

Below is an introductory paragraph with the sentences out of order. Place the sentences in their proper order:

- A. The four major categories of the Potato Scale rank TV viewers on a combination of leisure time spending watching, intensity of watching, and the desire to watch versus the desire to engage in other activities.
- B. Television viewers can be grouped in many ways—by the type of shows they watch (but there is no accounting for taste) or by hours per week of watching (but that seems unfair since a working, twelve-hour-a-week viewer cannot conceivably become a fifty-a-week viewer if he or she were out of a job).
- C. For years, television has been the great American pastime.
- D. So I have developed the Potato Scale.
- E. Nearly every household has at least one TV, which means that people are spending time watching it, unless, of course, they bought it to serve as a plant stand.

Sentence 1: _____

Sentence 2: _____

Sentence 3: _____

Sentence 4: _____

Sentence 5: _____