Guidelines for Writing a Strong Introduction

1. Ask a provocative question.

   Should health insurance companies continue to pay for rehab services when patients constantly put themselves back into danger by using drugs again?

2. Begin with a story or anecdote that is relevant to your thesis.

   I used to believe that it was possible to stop smoking by simply quitting cold turkey. When I tried this approach, however, I became so uncomfortable that I stared again just to alleviate the discomfort. I realized then that in order to quit smoking, I would need a practical solution that would overcome my cravings.

3. Offer a quotation that illustrates your thesis.

   As Indira Ghandi once said, “You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.” This truism is important to remember whenever people communicate, but particularly when they try to resolve a conflict. Both parties need to agree that there is a problem and then agree to listen to each other with an open mind.

4. Cite a little-known or shocking statistic.

   One study found that between 1963 and 1993 there was a 26 percent increase in the number of college students who admitted to copying academic work from another student. This increase suggests that students’ attitude toward cheating changed dramatically during that thirty-year period.

5. Move from general to specific.

   The First Amendment is the basis for several cherished rights in the United States, and free speech is among them. Therefore, it seems unlawful—even anti-American—for a disc jockey to be fired for expressing unpopular views on the radio.

6. State a commonly held misconception and then correct it.

   Many people have the mistaken notion that only homosexuals and drug users are in danger of contracting AIDS. In fact, many heterosexuals also suffer from the disease, and the number of heterosexuals who test HIV-positive is increasing every year. It is time the American public became better informed about the prevention of and treatment of AIDS.

7. Describe a hypothetical situation that illustrates your thesis.

   Suppose you were in a serious car accident and then slipped into a coma, with little hope for recovery. Unless you had a prewritten health care proxy that designated someone to act on your behalf, your fate would be left to medical doctors who knew nothing about you or your preferences for treatment.

8. Begin with an intriguing statement.

   Recent research has shown that the color pink has a calming effect on people. In fact, a prison detention center in western New York was recently painted pink to make prisoners more controllable in the days following their arrest.

9. Begin with a striking example.

   The penal system is sometimes too concerned with protecting the rights of the criminal instead of the victim. For example, during a rape trial the victim is often questioned about his or her sexual history by the defense attorney. However, the prosecuting attorney is forbidden by law to raise the question of whether the defendant has been charged with rape in any previous trial.

10. Make a comparison.

    The process a researcher uses to locate a specific piece of information in the library is similar to the process an investigator follows in tracking a criminal; both use a series of questions and follow clues to accomplish their task.