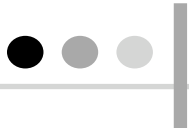


*The
Elegant
Essay*

Teacher's Manual

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Institute for Excellence in Writing
www.excellenceinwriting.com

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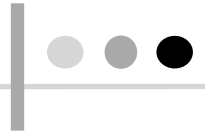


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TEACHING HELPS

Course Overview

Contents

The Elegant Essay course teaches middle and high school students the *form* of essay writing, that is, the basic structure or format or organization that undergirds all types of essays. Before they tackle this course, students should be able to write an understandable paragraph with a topic and clincher sentence.

Course topics include the following:

1. Thesis statement
2. Essay organization
3. Transitions
4. Introductions
5. Conclusions
6. Advanced thesis statements & planning charts
7. Descriptive practice essay
8. Persuasive practice essay

In addition to form or structure, writing includes four other components: ideas, style, mechanics, and voice. Although all of these are important, and sometimes we address them, they are not the focus of this introductory course.

Materials Needed

The student book contains all the handouts needed for the class. The teacher may make copies of selected pages from the teacher's book if needed for students.

Student Samples

I am grateful that some of my students have given me permission to share their work. Consequently, I have included authentic student samples throughout the lessons; however, I have corrected all mechanical errors and sometimes made additional modifications.

Schedule

The Elegant Essay is adaptable from a 4-week crash course (which I call Essay Boot Camp) to a 13 - 16 week basic course. Two sample schedules are included.



Teaching Strategy



The *Elegant Essay* course relies on a four-step teaching strategy:

- **Preliminary Instruction**—Each lesson begins with *instruction* in the students’ book, which speaks directly to the student, that you might use in a variety of ways. First, you might present the material in the sections orally, and then ask your students to read it on their own, perhaps as homework. Second, you might read the sections along with your students, stopping for explanation and clarification as needed. Third, you might ask the students to read it on their own ahead of time, and then focus on specific areas. I’ve experienced success with all methods.
- **Modeling**—After the initial instruction, *model* each lesson’s concept for your student(s). Lead him through the assignment, allowing him to contribute where he can; however, don’t be concerned if you are presenting most of the ideas. The idea behind the modeling step is to demonstrate the skills—how to write a thesis statement, for example. Lessons labeled “modeling” on the following pages are included to help you with this process. Additionally, the completed models are reprinted in the Unit 4 Note Page of the student text.
- **Practice with Help**—Next, allow your students to *practice* the ideas you’ve introduced, giving help where needed. This could be in groups if you are teaching a class, with a sibling if the two are close in age, or with you. If you are the partner, you will need to exercise some restraint and allow your student to take the lead, providing help only where needed. Each unit contains two sets of student exercises. The first lesson is designed to be used for this step.
- **On Your Own**—Unless students can perform the skills on their own, they haven’t mastered them. The second set of exercises in each lesson is designed to be completed independently or as homework. Review students’ work and offer additional instruction as needed. Make sure your students understand each lesson—how to write an introduction, for instance—but don’t expect mastery. They will have ample time to practice as they move on to writing actual elegant essays.

All of the lessons have been designed to facilitate the teacher who believes writing is not his or her strength. In fact, most of the parents of my writing students as well as classroom teachers say their own writing skills have improved as they work alongside their students. In the section on Lesson Plans, I’ve included a short list of lesson-specific problems I encounter as I teach these lessons.

For more information and discussion on this teaching strategy, see the section on Teaching Methods.

Grading & Evaluation



Too many times we evaluate our students prematurely before they have time to practice and internalize the concepts we teach them. Since this course introduces basic essay-writing concepts, I believe that students should have more time to practice them before being rated on their per-

formance and that formal evaluation should not occur until near the end of this course.

Two ways of grading students are discussed in the Grading Methods section of these teacher pages: a Checklist Method and a Point System. If you like either, feel free to use them, but keep in mind that you are also entirely free to devise your own system that meets your personal course objectives.

For more information on grading and evaluation, see the section on Grading Methods.

Course Schedule

For a Homeschool Co-op

I have used several schedules to teach the content of this course. When I teach homeschoolers, my class meets one day a week for two hours, and I teach an entire unit during those two hours. Students separate into small groups and complete the practice exercises; then we regroup and I offer further instruction as necessary. I assign homework, which students submit to me by e-mail two or three days before the next class meets. This gives me time to review and comment on their work and decide whether to re-teach or move on. A sample schedule for a co-op class follows.

For a Classroom

When I teach in the classroom, I teach these units along with some literature. That gives me time to review students' work and grade it if necessary before tackling the next essay topic. Sometimes I devote an entire class period to an elegant essay unit. At other times, I teach shorter lessons and intersperse them with my lessons on the literature. To develop a schedule for the classroom, use the sample co-op schedule, and teach each unit over the course of the week. For example, you might do the following:

- Day 1: Review homework/independent practice
- Day 2: Model/instruct
- Day 3: Practice with Help (group work)
- Day 4: Catch up or re-teach as necessary

For Essay Boot Camp

I've also taught these lessons over the course of three or four weeks in a concentrated way I call Essay Boot Camp. I've done this at the beginning of an honors-level 10th grade class and at the beginning of a 12th grade composition class. Although the students in these classes had some skill in essay writing, they just needed a bit of a refresher, so we were able to cover the ground pretty quickly. In both of these cases, I omitted the descriptive essay. A sample schedule for Essay Boot Camp follows.

The Elegant Essay Schedule for a Weekly Co-op Class

Unit	In Class	Homework <i>Complete Before Class</i>
1	<p>As needed, introduce yourself, the students, and your procedures.</p> <p>Optional: If students have not worked together before, you might conduct some kind of icebreaker. Google “Classroom Icebreakers” for ideas.</p> <p>Optional: If desired, review any previously-taught techniques. These might include the IEW Basic Essay Model and IEW style techniques (sentence openers / dress-ups / decorations). See Appendix C.</p> <p>Introduce <i>The Elegant Essay</i> book, especially its structure and format.</p> <p>Teach Unit 1—Essay Overview.</p>	
2	<p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss kinds of essays and their resulting thesis statements. Model how to create thesis statements for each.</p> <p>Group students (3 - 4 each) and give them practice generating theses using Exercise 1. Be sure to leave time to discuss students’ work and share it or One Class’s Answers to Exercise 1.</p>	Read TEE Unit 2.
3a	<p><i>Note: This unit is designed to take two weeks. If your student has had plenty of essay practice, you could do it in one, but I don’t recommend it.</i></p> <p><u>Week 1</u></p> <p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Go over and then collect Exercise 2. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students’ answers or One Class’s Answers to Exercise 2.</p> <p>Model the simple structure and discuss its use and limitations.</p> <p>Model telling vs. showing. Practice with class using sentences provided.</p> <p>Teach & model the first three kinds of evidence and support for body paragraphs: example, personal experience, statistics.</p> <p>Group students, assign Exercise 3a, and give them something to write their paragraph on (chart paper, transparency). When complete, the class should evaluate each group’s paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Is the paragraph understandable? Good topic, clincher, and flow? ➤ Does the evidence support the assertion? ➤ What is done well? ➤ What might be improved? <p>Assign Exercise 4a. Students should practice writing body paragraphs for the first three evidence/support methods only.</p>	<p>Exercise 2</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 3.</p> <p><u>To do ahead of time:</u> Find articles that contain statistics on courage, gifts, women in the military, or education. Students will need these statistics to write their practice body paragraphs. Alternatively, you might allow students to make up some statistics for this exercise only. Discuss how unethical that would be in an authentic situation.</p>

Unit	In Class	Homework <i>Complete Before Class</i>
3b	<p><u>Week 2</u></p> <p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss students' body paragraphs created for Exercise 4a. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers or One Class's Answer to Exercise 4a.</p> <p>Teach & model the remaining five kinds of evidence and support for body paragraphs: research/expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote, analogy.</p> <p>Group students, assign Exercise 3b, and give them something to write their paragraph on (chart paper, transparency). When complete, the class should evaluate each group's paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Is the paragraph understandable? Good topic, clincher, and flow? ➤ Does the evidence support the assertion? ➤ What is done well? ➤ What might be improved? <p>Assign Exercise 4b for independent practice. Students should practice writing body paragraphs for the remaining evidence/support methods.</p>	<p>Exercise 4a, choosing from the first three kinds of evidence: example, personal experience, statistics.</p> <p><u>To do ahead of time:</u> Find articles that contain research on courage, gifts, women in the military, or education. Students will need these statistics to write their practice body paragraphs. Alternatively, you might allow students to make up some statistics for this exercise only. Discuss how unethical that would be in an authentic situation.</p>
4	<p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss students' body paragraphs created for Exercise 4b. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers.</p> <p>Teach and model yellow line and road sign transitions.</p> <p>Group students, give them the sentence strips from Exercise 5, and have them create a paragraph with transitions. Share and discuss. Use One Class's Answer to Exercise 5 as needed.</p> <p>Assign Exercise 6 for independent practice.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 4b, choosing two of the remaining five types of support.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 4.</p> <p><u>To do ahead of time:</u> Copy and cut transition sentence strips.</p>
5	<p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss students' paragraphs created for Exercise 6. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers or One Class's Answer to Exercise 6.</p> <p>Teach each of the dramatic openings and introductory methods using the examples in the student pages and models.</p> <p>Break up into groups and complete Exercise 7. Have each group do all or a subset of the types. Share, discuss, and provide clarification where necessary.</p> <p>Assign Exercise 8 for independent practice.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 6.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 5.</p>

Unit	In Class	Homework <i>Complete Before Class</i>
6	<p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss students' paragraphs created for Exercise 6. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers or One Class's Answer to Exercise 8.</p> <p>Teach the basic conclusion technique and model it for both narrative and persuasive genres. Have groups try it with Exercise 9, and share the One Class's Answer as desired.</p> <p>Teach and model the seven conclusion techniques. Emphasize the importance of framing.</p> <p>Group students and ask them to practice creating conclusions using Exercise 10. Share examples from One Class's Answers to Exercise 10.</p> <p>Assign Exercise 11 for independent practice.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 8.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 6.</p>
7	<p>Discuss students' paragraphs created for Exercise 11. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers or One Class's Answer to Exercise 11.</p> <p>Review the form of an essay and the various pieces: evidence, transitions, introduction, conclusion. Re-teach as necessary. Return to Unit 4 and teach/review the bridge transition. Model how to turn Spurgeon's devotion into an essay.</p> <p>Have students write the essay in Exercise 12 individually in class. When complete, have them share first in pairs and then as a class.</p> <p>Assign Exercise 13 for independent practice.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 11.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 7.</p> <p><u>To do ahead of time:</u> Make sure students have access to dictionaries in case they need to look up some of the words in Spurgeon's devotion.</p>
8	<p><i>Note: This unit is scheduled for one week, but depending on how much practice your students have with planning charts, you may wish to add an additional week.</i></p> <p>Pop Quiz or Entry Card</p> <p>Discuss students' essays created for Exercise 13. Address issues. Share exemplary models from the students' answers or One Class's Answer to Exercise 13.</p> <p>Teach and model advanced thesis statements.</p> <p>Group students and have them do a thesis workshop using Exercise 14. Share results on the whiteboard or chart paper. Discuss discrepancies using One Class's Answers to Exercise 14 as needed.</p> <p>Assign exercise 15 for independent practice as necessary.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 13.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 8.</p> <p><u>To do ahead of time:</u> In preparation for the persuasive essay in Unit 10, you might conduct some research and gather some sources for students to use related to the prompt, "Is the Internet a hero or a villain?"</p>

Unit	In Class	Homework <i>Complete Before Class</i>
(8)	<p><i>Optional Week, As Needed</i></p> <p>Introduce the planning charts and model with the two narrative paragraphs provided.</p> <p>Group students and have them do Exercise 16.</p> <p>Assign Exercise 17 for independent practice.</p>	Complete Exercise 15.
9a	<p>Review the process for writing a descriptive essay. Choose topics; begin outlining using the form of choice.</p> <p>See the sequence of teaching steps in the lesson plans.</p>	<p>Complete Exercise 15 or 17.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 9.</p> <p>Work on first draft.</p>
9b	<p>Writing Workshop: Work on essays. Do thesis workshop or peer reviews, as desired.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> You may need a third week for this unit.</p>	<p>Finish essay.</p> <p>Read TEE Unit 10.</p>
10a	<p>Review the process for a persuasive paper. Do Exercise 18 (Internet thesis workshop) in class.</p> <p>See the sequence of steps in the lesson plans.</p> <p>Briefly discuss MLA citation. For free MLA guidance, see http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/.</p>	<p>Complete research.</p> <p>Work on first draft.</p>
10b	<p>Discuss methods of citing research. Continue working on papers with peers.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> You may need a third week for this unit.</p>	Finish essay.

The Elegant Essay Schedule for Essay Boot Camp

Three- or Four-Week Schedule

You probably won't be able to teach elegant essay concepts in fewer than three weeks, and even then, the three-week schedule is extremely aggressive. Both you and your students will need to be focused, and you will need to make sure you have plenty of time to grade, evaluate, and offer feedback.

If you feel this schedule is too aggressive, you might add five days and expand it to four weeks. Add days near introductions and conclusions, a day to evaluate the form review in Unit 7, a day for the persuasive essays (descriptive essay is omitted for Essay Boot Camp), and two others when you need them.

Elegant Essay Boot Camp Schedule				
Day	Unit	Lessons		
		Instruction & Modeling	Practice with Help	On Your Own
1	1-Overview	Introduction		
1	2-Thesis Statements	Reading/Modeling		
2	2-Thesis Statements	Group Practice	Exercise 1	Exercise 2
3	3-Essay Organization	SEE and Showing vs. Telling		
4	3-Essay Organization	Model example, personal experience, statistics	Exercise 3a	Exercise 4a
5	3-Essay Organization	Model remaining types of support	Exercise 3b	Exercise 4b
6	4-Transitions	Model transitions	Exercise 5	Exercise 6
7	5-Introductions	Model introductions	Exercise 7	Exercise 8
8	6-Conclusions	Model conclusions	Exercise 9	Exercise 10
9	7-Form Review	Model form	Exercise 12	Exercise 13
10	8-Thesis Polishing	Model advanced thesis	Exercise 14	Exercise 15
11	10-Persuasive Essay	Reading/Thinking	Rough Draft	
12		Evaluate & re-teach as necessary	Final Draft	
13	Wrap-up/Evaluate	Begin planning next elegant essay		

TEACHING METHODS

The overview section briefly introduced the teaching methodology and methods *The Elegant Essay* uses. This section discusses them in more detail and offers practical suggestions on how to use the methods in your classes.

Mini-Lectures

When you begin teaching, you will invariably begin with a mini-lecture to introduce the new material. The main thing to focus on with mini-lectures is to keep them *mini*—no more than 20 minutes. Students frequently lose concentration after this time and “zone out.” Even if they appear to be listening attentively, their minds might be miles away. In writing, students do need direct instruction, and lectures are the most efficient way to deliver it, but they also need immediate opportunities to put what they’ve learned into practice. Ideally, lectures should be interspersed with frequent modeling and practice sessions.

Reading—Before or After?

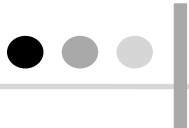
With respect to assigning reading from *The Elegant Essay*, you have a choice to make: Will you assign it before or after the teaching session? Either way has merit. If you assign the reading before, students should be familiar with the material before you model it. (To encourage accountability and check for understanding, you might administer pop quizzes, discussed below.) Your lectures could be shorter, and you could concentrate on troublesome areas rather than teaching the concepts from scratch.

On the other hand, if you always go over the same material contained in *The Elegant Essay* at the beginning of each class, students will ask themselves why they should read ahead or why they should pay attention in class. They’ve already read and understood what you’re teaching. In this case, it might be better to assign the reading after class, as review. This could also serve as extra reinforcement because students sometimes need to see information in a variety of forms over some period of time before they internalize it. Of course, you still might have an accountability issue.

You might try each method and see which works better for your students and situation.

Pop Quizzes & Entry Cards

I frequently administer either pop quizzes or entry cards at the beginning of class. The difference between the two is purpose. The quizzes act as incentives for students to come prepared for class. They provide accountability. Most of the time, I record quiz scores, and they become part of a student’s grade. The exception is when the entire class bombs the quiz. This tells me that either my quiz question was confusing or that I need to revisit the skill I was testing. And because the students who earned a high score feel I’m not being fair to them if I ditch the scores, I return the papers and tell them if they earn a lower score on a subsequent quiz, they can exchange this score for the future one. Many questions are suggested for each unit. Choose the ones you like—usually only one or two.



The procedure works this way:

- Quarter sheets of paper
- One or two short questions
- Collect papers or switch with another student
- Go over answers and perhaps correct in class

Suggestions for pop quiz questions appear in each unit's lesson plan.

The procedure for entry cards is exactly the same, but the purpose is a little different. Recognizing that most students need time to internalize a new skill, I might ask for an entry card about a skill I taught yesterday or last week. For example, after teaching how to write a thesis statement in Unit 2, on another day I might ask students to write a thesis statement for a particular writing genre and focus, or I might ask for an academic (three-pronged) thesis statement on a particular topic. After giving students a few minutes to think and write, I ask a few students to share their ideas. The class discusses these. I collect the entry cards because students don't feel the task is worth their effort if I don't, and glance over them. If I notice a particular difficulty, I address it.

Both the quizzes and the entry cards help me to know what has already been caught and what needs to be re-taught.

Note-Taking

If you lecture, your students should be taking notes—always. The reason is not so much that what you are saying is important, although it is, but that the students are *engaged*. Research shows that even if students never look at their notes again, simply the act of taking them increases retention. Plus, for students who have difficulty maintaining focus, the ones who are easily distracted, taking notes helps keep their minds on the task at hand.

Note pages are included at the end of each unit of the student book, right before the exercise pages. Because these include pre-printed headings, they will help students follow your mini-lecture's order. (If you skip a section, be sure to inform your students; otherwise they will get very confused!) Make sure students use these sheets. Force them if you have to. They should understand that note-taking is not optional.

You might meet resistance on two fronts. First, some students will say that note-taking is a "waste of time" because they already understand the material. In many cases, they are probably right. However, too many times I've seen students who relied on their memories and never devised a personal note-taking system fail miserably at higher educational levels. They never learned the skill. When they got to the point where they needed to use it, they couldn't. Second, some students will not know how to take notes. In that case, you need to teach them. How? By direct instruction ("Write that down") or modeling (demonstrating how to take notes on an overhead transparency, whiteboard, or easel) or following a model (look up Cornell Notes, for example).

If students need incentives and accountability to take notes, you might give it to them in a couple of different forms. First, monitor your class. Students who aren't taking notes should be gently reminded to do so. Second, periodically collect notes, especially at the beginning of the course when you are teaching this skill/procedure. Look them over, briefly, and address any difficulties. Grade them if that seems appropriate. Third, give periodic open-note quizzes where students can use their own notes but nothing else to answer quiz questions. Remember that you are building a skill (and a procedure). Once students have grasped it, you can back off on the accountability, or you might have to return to it briefly now and then just for reinforcement.



Modeling



Modeling is another word for demonstrating the steps involved in completing a particular skill. It's an extremely important part of teaching that overlaps your lectures. Yes, you want to *tell* your students about the skill ("The thesis statement gives form to an essay's ideas and helps readers to follow your thoughts."), but you also want to *show* them how to do it ("These are the steps you take to write a thesis statement. First, . . .").

Think Aloud

Some students will quickly catch on to whatever you are teaching. They will intuitively grasp the concept. Most will not however, especially in an area such as writing. They need step-by-step instruction. For them (and also for the intuitive learner who may not know *why* they know), you need to model your internal thinking, and one way to do this is by expressing your thoughts out loud.

For example, let's say you want to think of support for the idea that books are better than movies. You might think out loud and say something like this:

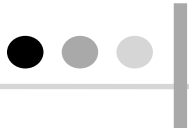
Well let's see. I know that when I support an idea I need proof. And I've learned that I can draw on several different areas for that proof or evidence. [Note that you need to use academic words such as *support*, *proof*, or *evidence*.] These are [write them on the board in a column as you say them] examples, personal experience, statistics, research, observation, description, anecdote, and analogy.

Well, I certainly don't want to do any research [cross off research], so let me think about the others. [Pause and look like you're thinking.]

Hmmm. I'm going to consider personal experience because that seems like the easiest for this situation. Have I ever seen a movie that I was really disappointed in, especially after reading the book? Yes! There was *Charly* with Cliff Robertson, which I saw after reading *Flowers for Algernon*. There was so much the movie left out! Plus, when it showed the technology center, those computers were so old they belonged in a museum. [Write "*Charly*—incomplete & antiquated" next to personal experience on the whiteboard.] I could use compare *Charly* and *Flowers for Algernon* and use that as proof or evidence. [Use of academic words again.]

I wonder if I can think of another example. Hmmm. [Pause.] After reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we saw the movie with Gregory Peck. The students in my English class [or group] said there were some scenes they liked better in the movie than in the book, like when Atticus guarded Tom Robinson at the jail. [Write "TKAMB—jail scene" on the board.]. But that might not work because it doesn't support my idea that books are better than movies. [Write some question marks after your note on the board—"???" Remember that it's important to demonstrate ideas that do and don't work out to teach students how to evaluate their own.]

You could continue, and if you were actually teaching this lesson, you would want to go through all the other areas, either thinking of proof that would work or saying something like, "I can't think of anything for this one right now," and drawing a dash next to it. But for purposes of how a think aloud works, we've done enough.



A couple of things are very important to do when you model. First, make sure you go through all of the skill steps in an orderly fashion, even if you think they seem obvious. You are building pathways in your students' brains, and if you make too big of a leap from one concept to the next, all of your effort will be lost. You must also write your thoughts down on an overhead, whiteboard, easel, or for a very small class, a piece of paper that everyone can see. This is extremely important because students will process what you tell/show them at different rates, and some students don't comprehend well what they hear orally. Seeing and hearing the concepts helps all students learn.

A couple of side notes: I have some perceptual motor difficulties, and it's very difficult for me to write on the whiteboard at the same time that I'm teaching or thinking. But I know students need this information in a visual form, so I've learned to compensate in two ways. Either I prepare my think aloud ahead of time (prewritten on an easel, PowerPoint slide, or overhead transparency), and then reveal a section at a time, or I ask a student to be my scribe and write my thoughts on the board. I explain to students why I do this, and that builds some camaraderie, especially with those who have academic difficulties. Plus it makes me seem more real rather than a know-it-all teacher. Second, I don't always have access to large whiteboards, overheads, LCD projectors, or other expensive equipment, and small whiteboards or easels don't always work, so I've found an inexpensive alternative: shower board from hardware stores. In the plumbing section, you will find very large boards (4' x 8') used to line shower stalls. You can write on these with a whiteboard marker, and although they won't last as long as the "real deal," they will do in a pinch. If you find it hard to get such a large board into your car, you can ask the store to cut it for you (they might charge for the cut) into two 2' x 8' or two 4' x 4' sections.

Modeling Helps

Because it is difficult to come up with modeling ideas on the spot, I've provided some suggestions on how to model each lesson. Keep in mind that these are only suggestions, and you (or your students) can probably come up with more and better ideas. I've tried to provide more modeling ideas than you will need, so you can use one (or two) ideas for the initial modeling and the remainder for reviewing or re-teaching. All of the models are reprinted in Appendix B of the student book; that way students can follow along, or if a student misses your class, he or she will have a way to catch up.

Segue to Practice

It's a good idea to overlap the modeling and practice steps and whenever possible to have your class think along with you. For example, in the above demonstration of the think aloud procedure, you might say something like, "I can't think of an analogy. Can any of you?" When students offer their own ideas, be sure to praise them. If it's an "off" example, gently correct and see if you can still use the idea. For example, "I'm not seeing how that's an analogy because I don't see the comparison between the two similar ideas, but that would make an excellent observation. Let's record it in that category [write it down]. It's a good one—thank you for sharing it." If you don't treat students' suggestions with respect, they won't offer them. And you want them to participate, to start thinking, and to be ready to do the next step with others.



Practice with Help



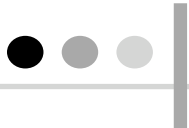
Have you ever been in the situation where you've listened to someone explain how to do something and understood, but when you went to do it on your own, you completely messed up? We all have. We can listen to explanations all day, but until we can perform the action on our own, we haven't learned. The Practice With Help step allows students to combine their brains with others' to practice the skill. You should move to this step once you feel students have understood your modeling in general, but before they have complete understanding.

Grouping Methods

There's been a lot written on how to group students and how to ensure that everyone participates. Should the groups be the same—all the same skill level (low, medium, and high groups), the same gender, the same interest? Or should they be diversified? Should students decide who to work with, should you, or should this be random? I've tried all of these methods, and use all of them from time to time, but the one I like the best is random, or at least seemingly random. (It's "seemingly" random because sometimes I make surreptitious choices that students are not aware of, like making sure that two students who tend to "goof off" aren't in the same group.) Students also like random groups because they never feel left out and get to work with people they wouldn't normally self-select.

If you would like to learn more about grouping methods, search for "Instructional Grouping Options" on the Internet. In the meantime, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Number off by the number of groups you want to end up with. For example, if you have fifteen students and you want three in each group, you will need five groups and should number off by five. You will also need to tell which group where to meet or you will have the loudest ones shouting, "Fives are here!"
- If you want groups of four students, get a deck of cards and pass them out randomly or fan them out and have students pick a card. Group like numbers or face cards together. If you have an uneven number, you can do one of two things. First, insert the joker(s) as a wild card. The student who draws the joker gets to pick whichever group he or she wants to work with. Second, remove some of the cards so that some groups will have only three members instead of four. If you have four groups and only fourteen students, you might remove one king and one queen so that the those groups only have three students in them.
- Find full-page pictures in magazines, either a very strange picture or a beautiful one. Make sure there is not too much advertising present if it is an ad. Mount the pictures on construction paper (make sure you use the same color for all of the pictures), and then cut them into two, three, or four sections. I laminate mine because I use them a lot. Make sure you have the same number of cards as students, adjusting as necessary. If I'm off by one, I have an extra card with something really strange or noticeable on it. (For me it's a squirrel's eye—don't ask!) The student who draws that gets to pick his or her group. If I'm off by more, I remove sections from some pictures. To find their group, students need to match their part of the picture with the others.
- If I'm grouping by opinion, for example asking students whether they agree or disagree with something, I use a technique called four corners. If students agree, they move to one corner. If they disagree, to another; if they qualify (agree under specific circumstances),



to another; and if they have no clue, to the final. Then I look at the groups and make adjustments as needed. I might have three students in one corner, which is fine, but I might have ten in another, which is not.

- I don't know how to explain this final method. There is a mathematical way to group students so that over the course of some period of time, they will have participated in a group with all of the other members of the class. I can never figure out the formula, but I have a friend who is good at that sort of thing and I ask her. To make this work, each student has to have (and remember) a permanent number. You call out the numbers for each of the groups, and students move to them.

There are lots and lots of other methods, but you don't want to use too many because then you will have to spend more time explaining how to get the students into groups than they will have to work in them.

Monitoring

You want group time to be focused and productive. You want students to talk about the skill you are teaching, not about the latest movie, about some other class's homework, or about random comments concerning black holes. You also want everyone to participate, not just one or two students. How do you ensure that?

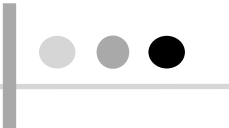
You make certain that students are on task by mingling with them. Walk around the room (or between the rooms), listen in on the conversations, and make yourself available. I usually listen to the group I have my back to. That seems less intimidating to the students, and I'm likely to hear more authentic conversation. I also make sure I slowly walk by each group with an "I'm available" attitude. It's interesting to me that so many students won't raise their hand to summon me to their group, but if I'm close by, they'll grab me and ask their question. Sometimes I can stand in one spot (on the side or in the back but never in "teacher-territory" at the front and center of the room) and listen to all the conversations. But I'm not that good at multiplexing, so I keep moving. You'll develop your own monitoring ideas.

Besides making sure students are on task and answering their questions, monitoring will help you determine when to pull the groups back together. Groups will work at different rates, and you want to train them to work quickly. Sometimes I'll ask the groups to show me by raised fingers how much more time they need. If one group says none, another two say one, and a fourth says five, I'll say, "You have one more minute. Please try to finish up by then." Then I'll go to the group that is finished, review their work, and perhaps ask them to give more attention to a specific area. Make sure your minute doesn't turn into two or five. Time yourself. Otherwise you are training your students to doubt you.

Reporting

Remember that the purpose of the group work is to practice a concept with help. That means *all* members should understand it, not just one or two. Frequently, I have groups that rely on one person, the perceived "brain." The "brain," who may not even need the practice, does all of the work and the other members, who do, skate. To prevent this, you might incorporate some accountability methods:

- **Note-Taking.** Require all members of the group to take notes. All of the group exercises are contained in the student book. Require students to record their thoughts there. Alternatively, sometimes I ask for these on loose-leaf paper so that they can be turned in



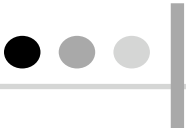
or in a “Group Work Journal,” a spiral notebook that I provide and that can only be used for group work in my class. At the beginning of the school year, the office supply stores in my area have a sale on spiral notebooks—I’ve seen them for as little as five cents each. I buy as many as I can and pass them out to my students. (Even if the store has limits on the number of notebooks each customer can purchase, if you say you’re a teacher, they might forgo the limit.) I ask students to begin each day’s group work on a new page, label the skill (Thesis Generation, for example), and date it.

As I’m walking around the room, I make sure that all of the students are writing in their books, and from time to time I collect them. Depending on the class and how much incentive they may need, I might also grade these for completion—A: extremely thorough and even more; B—thorough, well done; C—OK, minimum acceptable effort; D—lacking; F—very, very lacking.

- **Sharing.** I also require the groups to be prepared to share their ideas with the class as a whole. This is a critical step and so helpful to students as they hear and discuss the ideas their friends have come up with. Because there are so many different ways to form a humorous introduction, for example, I will ask several groups to share their thoughts. Not only is this helpful in understanding the skill, it also builds camaraderie as we all laugh together. I don’t usually have to do too much correction at the group stage, but if I do, I make sure to do it gently and lavish praise when I can.
- **Presenting.** Sometimes I ask students to come to the front of the class to present their group’s ideas. When I do, there’s always a mad scramble to determine who will be the sacrificial lamb, and usually it boils down to the same students. But this undermines my purpose that *everyone* in the group understands and is able to explain the group’s findings. Here are some ways to randomly select the presenter, and I usually announce one of these methods just before the presentation. Choose the person
 - ◇ whose birthday is closest (farthest) to today
 - ◇ who did/did not have rice (potatoes, vegetables, salad) for dinner last night
 - ◇ who has the most (fewest) computers (televisions, radios) in the home
 - ◇ who has traveled the farthest away from home
 - ◇ who has visited the most number of countries
 - ◇ whose grandparents live with them
 - ◇ who has the most (fewest) number of people living in their home
 - ◇ who has never owned a dog (cat)
 - ◇ your own creative ideas

Other ways to select the presenter are to keep a list and make sure that everyone has had a chance to present by the end of some period of time, to write students’ names on Popsicle sticks and draw one from a container to choose one person, and then let him or her choose the next (my students call this popcorn), or whatever. The only problem with keeping a list is that once a student has been “checked off,” he or she might not be as engaged in future group work. To prevent this, you might call on a few students more than once, maybe those who aren’t as fearful as others.

Speaking of fearful students, some really have a problem with talking in front of a group. It scares them witless. If you have a student like this, you might allow him or her to bring a friend for moral support. The two of them go to the front of the class, but only one talks. The other listens attentively and encourages. And by the way, you might have to teach *all* of your students how



to listen attentively and encourage whoever is speaking. Try to avoid putting students in situations where they can't cope; otherwise, they will never learn to cope.

Not a Clue

At some point, you will model a skill, move students into groups, and then find out they are completely confused and off track. If this hasn't happened to you yet, it will. Even the very best of teachers will find themselves in this situation on occasion. What do you do? Stop the class, go back to the modeling, begin at the beginning, and review the steps. Your students realize they are confused, so ask them if they understand the step as you model. (A good way to do this is to ask for "thumbs": thumbs up for "I've got it"; thumbs down for "I'm still confused"; and thumbs sideways for "I'm still tentative.") Try to figure out where the disconnect occurred. It may be your teaching; it may be students' lack of attention; it may just be one of those days. When students think they are ready, resume the group work, monitor, and offer individual help where needed.

What Do Groups Do?

It's all well and good to put students into groups, but then what? What do the students *do* in their groups? You should always have a purpose for group work, and you should always be able to state it to your students: "Here's what I want you to do and why." For each of the units in *The Elegant Essay*, there are two sets of exercises; one to work on collaboratively in groups and another for independent practice. Beyond that, there are additional suggestions for group activities in the Lesson Plans section for each unit.


Independent Practice

Of course the goal of your teaching is reaching the point where all of your students can perform all of the skills you teach entirely on their own. The steps we've talked about so far, mini-lecturing, modeling, and group practicing, will help students learn and will help them build those brain pathways, but the final objective is reaching the point where they can perform the skill independently. When they get home and none of their friends are around, can they still do it? The second set of exercises in each unit provides the opportunity for independent practice, but you still need to check to see if each student "got it" or if more practice is needed. On the other hand, you don't want to get too bogged down in paperwork. Writing teachers, more than teachers of other subjects, seem to have so much paperwork to deal with already, how can they keep up and still meet the needs of their students? I have a couple of ideas.

Checking Homework

If you are teaching a class that meets once a week, you might ask students to e-mail their homework to you a day or two before the class meets. This will give you a chance to look over what students have done well and what needs to be revisited. You might also select a few responses to share with the rest of the class and explain what is exemplary about them.

Alternatively, you might ask students to open their student books to the homework page and on some kind of a master list, check off the ones that are complete. You might do this during a pop quiz to save class time. You might check off yes or no, or you might have three categories: done with



good effort, done cursorily or skimpily, and not done. If students know you are going to check, they are more apt to find time to do the work during their busy schedules.

After checking to see that the homework is done, ask students to take out a different color pen or pencil. For example, if they did the homework in pencil, they might take out a pen; if a blue pen, they might take out a green one. Tell them that as you discuss the homework as a class, you expect them to add new thoughts and clarifications to their own assignment using the new color. Then read each question and call on a student to answer it. You might randomly choose students; choose the one closest to you, and then continue in a pattern; draw a Popsicle stick with a student's name on it from a container; or choose one student, and let him or her choose the next (popcorn). Instead of asking for just one answer to a question, especially when there are choices to be made, you might call for two or three. Discuss students' answers/ideas, be affirmative, and re-teach or clarify where necessary. Once you are sure students can perform the skill you've taught, but perhaps not perfectly, you are ready to move on to the next skill.

Reviewing

After students turn in their homework, you still aren't done practicing the skill. With writing, students practice each skill in each essay they write. Because of this, review is built in, and you won't have to make up review exercises. The more students write, the more they will practice their skills. And the more they practice their skills, the more proficient they will become.



Unit Five

Introductions



Face it, most essays are rather dull. Not that they have to be or should be, but they are. Not the ones that your students write or mine either, but the majority of essays written in schools across the country are inordinately blasé. In fact, I do believe that some teachers encourage lifeless essays, including many (but thankfully not all) science and history teachers. What is a creative student to do?

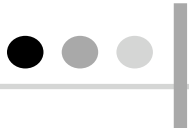
For many students, especially those with an excess of creative juices, introductions are their favorite part of essay-writing. It's the first place that they can wax eloquent with impunity. These creative souls eventually develop their own personal writing voice (or writing personality), but that takes time and effort. Introductions are easier. Encourage your students to have fun with this unit. Reward and praise their efforts.

Pop Quizzes and Entry Cards

1. What is a funnel? (an introduction that gives background and introduces the thesis)
2. There are seven different kinds of introductory techniques. Name three. (funnel, question, benefit, funny or startling statement, quotation, dialogue, story)
3. What is the main purpose of an introduction? (Hook the reader's attention—make him or her want to keep reading.)
4. What is a dramatic opening? (an opening that is particularly engaging, usually a story with action, that precedes the “real” introduction)
5. What is one problem with many introductions? (omitting them, starting too early, dull)

Lesson Specific Issues

- Introductions should compose an entire paragraph, not just one sentence. Many of my students' introductions are too brief.
- Encourage students to rewrite the entire introductory paragraph in the exercises rather than just to tack on another sentence, such as a question, startling statement, or quotation. They should also feel at liberty to change some of the words, especially the verbs.
- When adding creative details, be careful students do not stray too far away from the original topic.
- Be sure dialogue or a startling statement connects with the rest of the introduction.
- Disallow statements like, “By reading this essay...” or “I intend to show...” or “By way of introduction. . . .”
- Completely disallow any “I” statements in the introduction: “I think,” “I believe,” others.
- Require your student to try *all* of the introductory techniques. You might have to help with content, suggesting a quotation or Bible verse, for example.
- My favorite source for quotations is www.ThinkExist.com. Others include the following Web sites: www.quotationspage.com, www.quoteland.com, and www.brainyquote.com.
- Make sure the introduction makes sense and uses good transitions.



Mini-Lecture & Modeling

You're not going to have to introduce your students to introductions. No doubt they are completely familiar with them and have struggled with them in other assignments, from book reports to research reports. In fact, you might hear an audible groan as you introduce today's topic. To sever this line of thought, emphasize that today's lesson will draw on students' creativity.

You might begin by asking how many students would rather write a story in place of an essay or how many prefer creative writing to expository (non-fiction) writing. You probably will have a few. Reassure them that today the rest of the class will need their talents. No, they can't write an entire story with a beginning, middle, climax, and end (which, actually, I've had students try to do), but they can be creative. This should come as a welcome relief after the highly technical units on thesis generation, body paragraphs with evidence, and transitions.

It's important to model each of the introductory techniques on the same topic to show students that the topic does not necessarily limit the kind of introductory technique available. First, read the funnel introduction in the modeling techniques below. Put it up on an overhead, PowerPoint slide, or big piece of chart paper, or write it on your whiteboard. Discuss it with your students. Does it make them want to continue reading? Is it compelling? What does it lack? I'm hoping someone will say that it is lifeless. Although there's nothing wrong with the content, the presentation leaves something to be desired. Tell your students you will be looking for ways to make this introduction more appealing.

Student Book

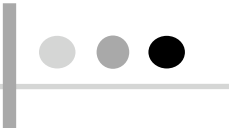
Direct students to the seven types of introductions in their book. You might call on individual students (see possible methods discussed elsewhere) to read each of the examples. After discussing the examples in the student pages, return to the model. Ask students questions and interact with them to come up with introductory options for the model, and write notes about them on the board. If your students' ideas are better than mine and they generate more creative ideas, excellent! This is what you want—creativity.

Model Examples

After discussing students' ideas, you might read aloud each of the intro techniques in the modeling that follows. If you have students who have difficulty processing information audibly, you will also have to show the model visually. Overheads and PowerPoint slides are the easiest. You might also direct them to the models in Appendix A of their books, but make sure students do not read the model until after you have solicited their ideas. (You might ask students to cover the page with a piece of scrap paper and reveal only one technique at a time.)

Notes on the Models

- **Question.** Note that the question model actually contains three questions. This is fine; however, if students decide to ask more than one question, they should strive for three. Two is too few, and the effect lessens with more than three.
- **Benefit.** The benefit in this example is that God is glorified. Students might also infer that another benefit is being a good witness for the Lord so we can share Christ with others.
- **Humor.** While this particular example is not exactly funny, it does startle. Two good ways to write a startling statement are to take a worn-out cliché and twist it or



to take a common saying (as in this case) and redirect it. Note also that the same student wrote the second and fourth examples, and they sound a bit similar. This is fine as long as each demonstrates the specific technique.

- **Quotation.** “Just say no” was a popular phrase at the time this introduction was written. It may not be as familiar to your students.
- **Dialogue.** Conversation does not have to be authentic as long as it sounds made up, like this example.
- **Story.** The key to the story is description and imagery (appeal to the senses). It is not a full-blown, multi-page actual story (which some students really, really want to write.)

Practice with Help

Also see suggestions for groups in the Teaching Methods section.

Groups of three or four work well for this exercise. Depending on the size of your class, assign each group a specific technique to try. If you have a class of at least 18, assign all of the techniques, doubling up where needed. If you have fewer, assign three or four of the techniques, one per group.

First Sharing

Give students a few minutes to come up with an introductory idea for their particular technique for Exercise 7. While the whole group collaborates on the ideas, students should write the group’s introduction in their student book. This is extremely important because it ensures that everyone is engaged and that all students will have examples to refer to when they do the independent practice on their own.

When students have had time to work out their ideas (perhaps give a two-minute warning), call everyone back together and ask groups to share. Since this is a low-key, non-threatening kind of sharing, you might call on your more reticent students, but any sharing method is fine. Ask students to read their introductions aloud to the class, comment on them, and lavish praise and encouragement where you can. Direct the class to write notes in the spaces provided in Exercise 7 so that they will remember techniques they like. In my experience, even the students who don’t like to learn audibly have no difficulty with listening to groups report orally. That’s because the introductions are *interesting* and hook attention, which is the goal.

Second Sharing

After the first sharing, assign the remainder of the techniques, or if all were demonstrated the first time, allow students to pick a new one they would like to try. Strive for variety though. It’s not that interesting to listen to six question introductions in a row. Direct students to write their group’s introduction in their student books, and then call on students to share as above.

On Your Own

Assign students Exercise 8 to do on their own. They should complete the entire exercise and have examples for each introductory technique. When you discuss these exercises, draw on One Class’s Answers as needed for models.

Introductory Techniques

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.

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 over-commit 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.

One Class's Answers

Exercise 7

2. Ask a question.

Do you like plants? Do you have some spare time? Would you enjoy teaching others basic botany and planting techniques? If so, you might consider volunteering as a municipal garden docent.

Many gardens offer docent training programs to equip you to lead tours, identify plants and their origins, and use drought-tolerant plants in your own garden.

Note: Begins with question, in this case, a triple question.

or

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. Is Bancroft Gardens calling you?

3. Show a benefit to be gained.

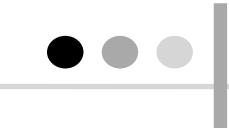
Docents at the Bancroft Gardens learn their Latin. Words like *Corydalis solida* roll easily off their tongues. As part of an eight-week class, docents learn to lead public tours, identify specific plants and their pedigrees, and choose drought-tolerant species for their own gardens. Latin instruction comes as an added benefit.

or

Municipal garden docents get to spread their love of plants like the shoots of the bamboo plants they tend.

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

Cacti from the Sonoran Desert, coffee plants from the slopes of the Andes, and anthuriums from the interior of the Hawaiian Islands all make their home in Walnut Creek, California. Vol-



unteer docents delight to share these exotic plants with thousands of visitors each year. Constantly recruiting help, the gardens offer quarterly classes on leading tours, identifying plants and their origins, and using drought-tolerant plants in local gardens.

or

Stroll through the Bancroft Gardens, but don't wander too far from the path—unless you want to be attacked by a cactus.

or

Docents at the Bancroft Gardens explore their roots.

or

True love is at the root of garden docents' efforts.

5. Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss." The stones at the Bancroft Gardens do not roll, but they are covered with plenty of moss. Among other duties, volunteer docents help visitors enjoy and identify the garden's ten varieties of moss. They learn all kinds of facts in classes designed to equip them to lead tours, identify plants and their origins, and promote drought-tolerant plants in local gardens.

6. Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.

"People get really excited looking at exotic plants. It's fun and rewarding to share the history of the hundreds of plants thriving at the Bancroft Gardens," said Amanda Stewart, explaining her docent duties at the newly opened municipal gardens. Bancroft Gardens, like other non-profit organizations, relies on volunteers to educate the public. They offer classes to equip docents to lead tours, identify plants and their origins, and use drought-tolerant plants in local gardens.

Note: Writer used an "actual" quote, perhaps obtained from an interview.

7. Relate a story or paint a descriptive picture.

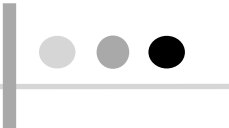
The morning sun spreads its rays over the Bancroft Gardens, like a mother rousing her sleepy children. California poppies unfurl their golden blooms, and hundreds of roses dispel their fragrant perfume, while docents prepare to share the garden's delights with school children, out-of-town visitors, and even some locals. To equip volunteers, the gardens offer classes on leading tours, identifying plants and their origins, and using drought-tolerant plants in local gardens. In fact, a class begins next week.

One Class's Answers

Exercise 8

2. Ask a question.

Is oversleeping a problem for you? Monks of the Middle Ages encountered a similar difficulty. To obey the command 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 their prayers. Enter the medieval mechanical clock, the greatest invention of all time. First appearing on cathedrals in



the thirteenth century, clocks now appear on every dashboard, wrist, and wall. Providing a reliable way to tell time, clocks drastically impact society and all of life. (Amber Myers)

3. Show a benefit to be gained.

A lot of people run late these days. It is not only an annoyance to the people who are waiting but also very stressful for the person who is running late. There happens to be a blessing from the Middle Ages that may relieve today's stress: the clock. This clever device can be worn on the wrist or installed in a car. No more late events. This wonderful invention provides a reliable way to tell time. It drastically impacts society and all of life as it relieves stress in today's busy world. (Brianna Swanson)

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

Without it, life as we know it would cease to exist on planet earth. In fact, recently there was a worldwide panic attack about it. No, not the ozone layer. Clocks. What started as a thirteenth-century device to call monks to prayer has developed into a key part of civilization. Just how important are they? Consider an example. The whole Y2K problem was about tiny clocks inside computers. People were so scared about what would happen when those tiny clocks got confused about the date that many moved to the country and dug bomb shelters. Clocks have drastically impacted our lives in other ways as well. (Cailin Andruss)

5. Begin with a quotation or familiar saying.

Necessity is the mother of almost all inventions, including the clock. It all started in the Middle Ages when monks found that they needed a reliable timekeeper that would wake them up in time for prayer. The medieval mechanical clock was the solution that began appearing in thirteenth-century cathedrals. Now clocks are everywhere and have drastically impacted our society. (Cailin Andruss)

6. Begin with dialogue—real or imagined.

“Mom, what time is it?”

It may seem like an ordinary question, but at one point in time there were no clocks. During the Middle Ages, monks had a problem. How could they rise in the night to say their monastic prayers? Inventors came to their rescue with clocks. They first appeared in cathedrals in the thirteenth century but now appear on every dashboard, wrist, and wall. Providing a reliable way to tell time, clocks drastically impacted society and all of life. (Amber Myers)

7. Begin with description or a story.

The monks of the Middle Ages had a problem. In order to fulfill the required prayers each night, they had to wake up consistently on time. However, they did not have a reliable way to keep time because sundials don't work at night. So they got creative, and the medieval mechanical clock was born. Ever since, clocks have drastically impacted society and all of life. (Cailin Andruss)



And Then . . .

Every now and then I come across an introduction that I just have to clip and save. Since I came across this one while revising these pages, I just had to share it.

Before it became the single biggest environmental catastrophe in American history, BP's Deepwater Horizon was a magnet for barracudas, which endlessly circled the oil rig in the Gulf's warm waters, feeding on smaller fish. The oil plume and massive cleanup have driven away many of the underwater predators. But as a group of Vietnamese-American lawyers discovered before returning to the Bay Area from the Gulf of Mexico last week, the barracudas have come ashore.

And they were carrying briefcases.

What a wonderful dramatic opening!

Newman, Bruce. "Lawyers Target Unwary Fisherman." *Contra Costa Times* 5 July 2010: A1. Print.