

Writing the Introductory Paragraph

Identifying the general topic.

Introducing the material.

Writing the Thesis sentence.

Some general rules...

- An introduction needs to be a complete paragraph—at least 5 sentences.
- Introductions begin by discussing the essay topic in the most general way—2 to 3 sentences.
- You must mention the work (novel or play) and author—1 sentence.
- The last sentence is your claim/ thesis.

Identifying the general topic

The first thing you need to do is identify the general topic in the essay prompt.

Essay questions with rubric.docx

Look at the essay prompt on the next page and in one word, answer the following question. . .

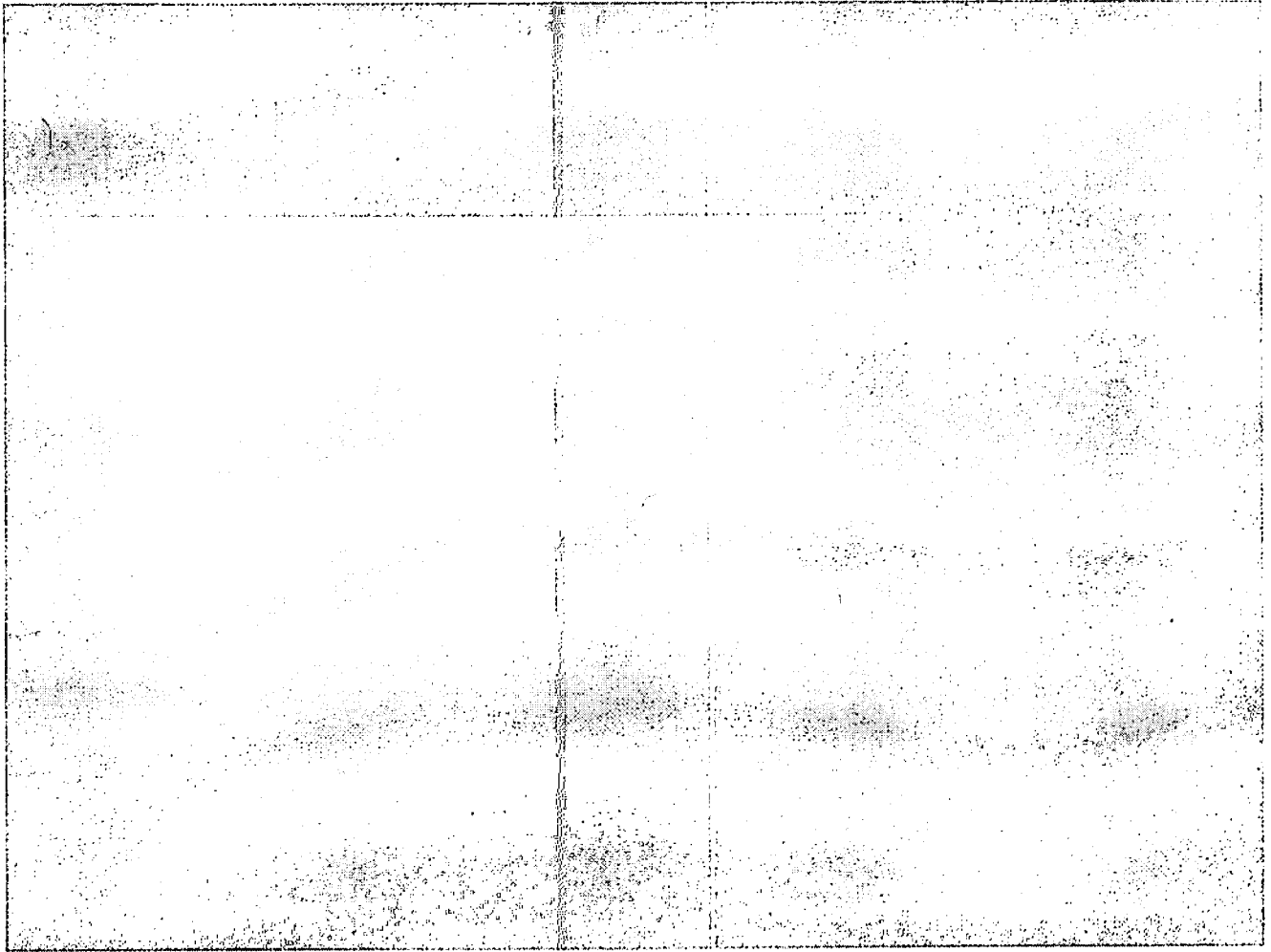
What is the general topic?

Essay Prompt

In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel or the opening scene of a drama introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the opening scene of a drama or the first chapter of a novel in which you explain how it functions in this way.

What is the general topic?

- In one word, the topic of this essay is?
- Addressing this prompt successfully requires you to...



Step one: introducing the topic

- **Think about how the first chapter usually works in literature.**
- **How does the author use it in the work you are discussing?**
- **Having given the function of an opening chapter some thought, write three good sentences about its purpose in literature.**

Step one example:

A novelist often uses the first chapter to introduce key information and to grab the reader's attention. The details revealed early in a book serve as a lens for the later action. An author usually tries to make the opening chapter count because it might be his/her only chance to make a lasting impression.

3-4 General sentences about the prompt's topic

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Some important points...

- Notice that the title of the book does NOT appear in the first sentence.
- All of what is here is the writer's opinion. The sentences actually say something, they don't just babble.

Step two: Introducing the work and author

- Now that you have addressed the topic of the prompt, you are ready to introduce both the author and the work you are discussing.
- This should be done at this point in the paragraph and nowhere else!
- One sentence should do it.

Step two example:

This is the case in Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street*.

or

An example of a careful use of a first chapter is *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros.

3-4 General sentences about the prompt's topic

Step 1

1 Sentence that introduces the author and work

Step 2

Step 3

Adding the two steps:

A novelist often uses the first chapter to introduce key information and grab the reader's attention. The details revealed early in a book serve as a lens for the later action. An author usually tries to make the opening chapter count because it might be his/ her only chance to make a lasting impression. This is the case in the novel *The House on Mango* by Sandra Cisneros.

Step three: The Claim/Thesis sentence.

- Your claim should be the last sentence in your introductory paragraph.
- Your claim is your point, your “answer” to the essay prompt.
- It should be one, declarative sentence, that “answers” the prompt with your opinion.

(continued)

- Your claim/thesis is the most significant sentence in the entire essay.
- It must take what you have said about opening chapters and tell the reader how you think the author uses it to develop meaning.
- You must make this sentence count!

Note the following:

In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel or the opening scene of a drama introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the opening scene of a drama or the first chapter of a novel in which you explain how it functions in this way.

An effective claim will “answer” this prompt

- **What is the meaning of the book?**
- **How is the first chapter related to the meaning?**
- **How is the opening chapter used to develop the author’s meaning?**

Step three example

Her book emphasizes the ability of an individual to overcome great obstacles, and her first chapter is carefully constructed to show the connection between finding personal identity and happiness.

Step 1

3-4 General sentences about the prompt's topic

Step 2

1 Sentence that introduces the author and work

Step 3

1 Declarative sentence that is your answer to the prompt. This the most important sentence of your paper. You must make it count.

Note the following:

**There is no one right answer to the question
“what is the author’s meaning.”**

The final product:

A novelist often uses the first chapter to introduce key information and grab the reader's attention. The details revealed early in a book serve as a lens for the later action. An author usually tries to make the opening chapter count because it might be his/ her only chance to make a lasting impression. This is the case in the novel *The House on Mango* by Sandra Cisneros. Her book emphasizes the ability of an individual to overcome great obstacles, and her first chapter is carefully constructed to show the connection between finding personal identity and happiness.

Summary

- A properly constructed essay introduction identifies the writer's point.
- It structures the essay for the reader in advance.
- It contains a claim/ thesis sentence which is the guiding and governing idea for the whole essay.

