

INTRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Stable Context – The author opens by offering a societal phenomenon that is generally observed in popular culture. She does not simply state that the popularity of perceived authenticity is common; she also provides common examples of praise given to public figures that align with this trend. However, this is not the main claim of her essay; rather, she uses it to highlight the *limitation* of blindly favoring authenticity over artifice. Even in what seems to be a neutral introduction, the use of words such as "paradoxical" already prime the reader to consider authenticity an imperfect ideal. By using her opening sentences to suggest a common perception that she quickly undermines, the author puts herself in a position to further analyze the flaws of the commonly held belief.

Destabilizing Condition – After establishing the seemingly stable position that society generally values authenticity as a virtue, the author immediately complicates this claim by providing a limitation—being true to oneself may have negative consequences when one's true identity is not viewed favorably. In essence, she argues that to believe authenticity to always be preferable is extremely limiting, as it fails to account for exclusionary spaces. By casting doubt on a commonly held belief, the author demonstrates how her essay engages a genuine question and that her answer pushes beyond the assumed as a result.

Consequence or Motive – The author does not merely present the problem of authenticity in the face of exclusion. She also justifies her essay's engagement with that problem by emphasizing both the historical significance of her resolution and its continued influence on marginalized people in exclusionary spaces. She suggests that if we accept her views on authenticity—namely, that *inauthenticity* can be a tool for positive change—we as readers can develop a deeper understanding of how to reconstruct exclusive spaces into inclusive ones.

Ask any influencer: authenticity is *in*. As social media increasingly dominates pop culture, there is a paradoxical trend emerging, one that favors authenticity in the midst of a constructed digital reality. Think praise for celebrities who know how to "keep it real," or the popularity of YouTubers who profit off of a "relatable" image. However, pushing a positive connotation onto "authenticity" forces a negative connotation onto "inauthenticity," resulting in conflicting interests: is authenticity still king when one's true identity is cause for exclusion? After all, people of color in the global West have been systemically and societally excluded for centuries from art and academia, posing important questions of whether some versions of the "authentic self" are preferred over others. A comparative analysis of Kerry James Marshall's painting *Untitled* and Shakespeare's classic *Othello* offers a solution, proving that artifice has the potential to be a powerful—and necessary—tool in the reconstruction of exclusive spaces.

Main Claim or Thesis – Though her stance has emerged steadily as the paragraph has progressed, the author concludes her introduction with a clear statement of her position that inauthenticity, or "artifice," can be a positive, even powerful, tool. Her main claim goes beyond simply affirming her stance that artifice should not blindly be condemned by noting *how* she arrives at this conclusion: through a comparative analysis of seemingly unrelated works of different mediums. Looking forward, this claim previews the analysis that will unfold in the body of her essay, but it also responds directly to the original conflict that was raised. She engages with the competing views of inauthenticity—as either a vice or necessity—by settling on one. However, the author does not reject the value of authenticity outright; she simply raises an exception to the rule, adding nuance to her argument.

WRITING SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS

In the most abstract sense, the function of an introductory paragraph is to move your reader from the world of daily life into the textual and analytical space of an essay. In a more concrete sense, an introduction performs three essential functions: 1) it articulates the question or **problem** that you will address in your essay; 2) it **motivates** that problem by suggesting why it is consequential or interesting; and 3) it states, clearly and directly, your position on this topic or question (i.e. your **main claim**).

Conceptual Components

Ethos – While reading your introduction, your audience will begin to make assumptions about you as an author. Be sure to present yourself as a thoughtful, knowledgeable writer capable of dealing effectively with the complexities and nuances of your topic. Your introduction should set the tone that will remain consistent throughout your essay. In addition to emphasizing the uniqueness of your approach to your subject matter, you should seek to draw your reader into your essay with the gracefulness of your prose and the rational demeanor you project as a writer.

Problem – A *question* becomes a *problem* when your reader feels a stake in resolving it. Your introduction should convey not simply that your essay will provide an answer that your reader may not have considered, but that he or she will benefit from this answer with practical knowledge or increased understanding. Writing problems are typically generated by establishing a seemingly stable position (“Ask any influencer...”) and then calling that initial position into question by presenting complicating or conflicting evidence (“However...”).

Structural Components

Stable Context – In addition to grabbing the reader’s attention, the opening sentence of an essay sets up the structure of the introductory paragraph. Because the larger goal of an introduction is to demonstrate what the reader might learn from an essay, argumentative essays typically open by establishing a seemingly stable position that is then complicated or destabilized soon afterward, thereby exposing a gap in understanding for the essay to address.

Destabilizing Condition – After establishing a plausible understanding of an essay’s subject, the author then invokes a condition—an alternative explanation, an unassimilable fact—that destabilizes that initial position. This destabilizing condition works in tandem with the stable context to establish a *problem* that needs resolved, thereby establishing the topic of the essay.

Note: The relationship between the Stable Context and Destabilizing Condition is sometimes referred to as "They Say/I Say," referring to the eponymous book by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. In short, the "They Say" refers to something obvious or previously/commonly held belief. The "I Say" refers to the author's own argument that challenges the original idea(s).

Consequence or Motive – The mere existence of a problem is not enough to justify an investigation if the audience doesn’t see anything at stake in its resolution. As a result, an author must be certain not only to establish a genuine problem but to outline its stakes. What is gained by a clearer understanding of this problem? What additional areas might it allow us to investigate?

Main Claim or Thesis – The main claim of an essay should not simply state the topic of investigation; it should articulate a clear stance on that topic. As a claim, it must take a position that resolves the problem generated when the initially stable context becomes destabilized. The strongest thesis statements are as specific as possible, typically highlighting some of the evidence to be used in the body of the essay and, in some cases, previewing the structure of its longer argument.