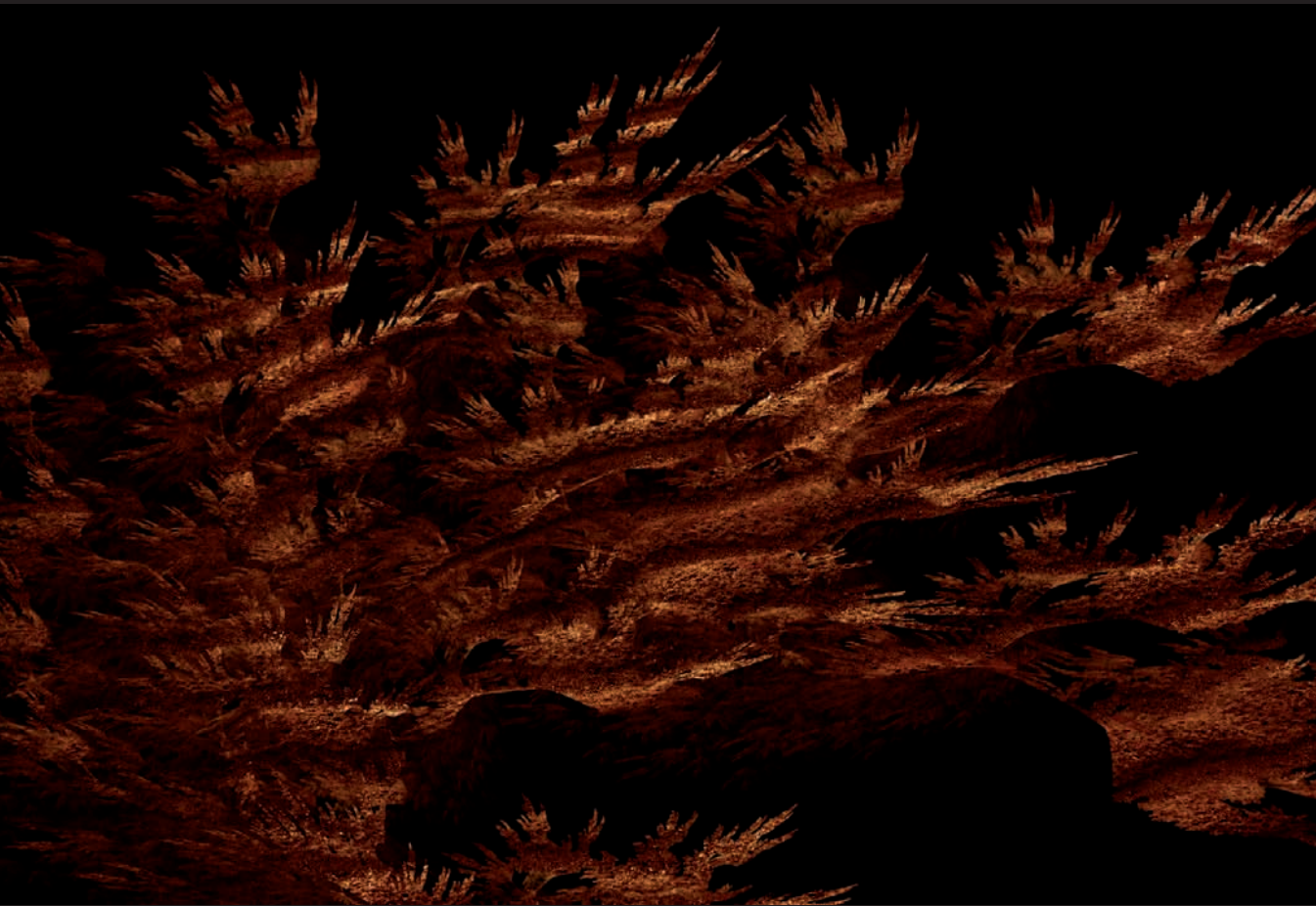


REASON TO WRITE



GINA L. VALLIS

Whiteface/Blackface:
Representation and Race in American Film

Taking a Shot:
The Role of Imbedded Journalism, from Vietnam to Iraq

If the Jeans Fit:
The Use of the Image of Individualism in Product Marketing

The third example, above, for example, would ensure that any person seeking articles that concern issues of “race,” “American,” or “film” would be able to access that article if he or she entered those keywords into a library database, whether at a physical library, or a virtual one.

3 EXORDIUM: “YO!” OR “LO!”

Exordium means introduction, or beginning. In rhetoric, it serves the purpose of preparing an audience for the content that will follow. In some ways, the opening to an essay is just like meeting someone face-to-face, for the first time. The reader is going to make a lot of judgments, conscious and unconscious, about the writer, based upon that initial encounter.

While there are several strategies for opening a paper that will be covered in this chapter, remember that the main point of your introduction is to establish common ground with the reader. This means resisting the urge to sum up your whole paper in one go.

The easiest, and often the most successful, openings, offer straightforward statements that are very specific, directly related to the question at hand, and that a typical reader would find reasonable and fair. Three to five such statements, in relationship to your question, will build a foundation from which to begin to answer it, and create an initial impression of the writer as a patient, trustworthy thinker.

In planning her opening, the student who was writing about Reality TV gathered together a series of key points. Each point was something with which a typical reader would probably agree, and each laid the groundwork for the way in which she would begin her analysis. She ended the opening with a question. Her statements were:

1. Reality TV is a genre that is a mixture of documentary, drama, and game show

2. Reality TV generally has some kind of conflict that main participants must endeavor to overcome
3. Reality TV claims to be unscripted, but it is heavily edited.

Question: In what ways does reality television create specific effects that explain its popularity as a genre?

EVER WANTED TO KNOW?

Break your prose into 2–3 paragraphs per page, assuming it is in typical 12-point, double-spaced type. One long paragraph is exhausting.

Use common sense: don't break a paragraph in the middle of an idea, and don't start a new idea in the middle of a paragraph.

ALERT! ATTENTION! WARNING! DANGER! BEWARE!

Beginning an essay with "Since the beginning of time..." or "From the moment humans first walked the Earth..." is like beginning a novel with: "It was a dark and stormy night." *Definitely* to be avoided.

More often than not, the opening to an essay is more than a single **paragraph**. It goes on for as long as it takes to serve its purpose. In doing so, it performs its primary task: to find common ground with the reader and introduce a question.

In whatever discipline one is writing, the opening always offers the question to be posed, problem to be solved, or issue to be resolved. Whether this is offered in an implicit, or explicit manner, the opening sets up the issue at hand—what is in question. Writers who are new to *unlearning* the five-paragraph form are usually best served by making the question explicit.

Other functions of the Opening

While it is important to keep the main function of the opening in mind, in regard to establishing the question at hand, there are other purposes that the opening serves:

- The essay opening introduces the voice of the writer. Readers will quickly form opinions about writers within the first paragraph or so, and it's important that a writer takes extra care to immediately establish *ethos* with the reader. In other words, writers should strive to appear reasonable, unhurried, specific, and honest, right away.

The primary way to do this is to make clear statements, and strike a tone of honest curiosity in asking your question. This is the opportunity to draw your

reader in, catch his or her interest, and demonstrate that the question being posed is one worth exploring.

- At this point, the writer will also indicate the level of formality of the writing, which can vary, stylistically and according to disciplinary convention.

Once established, this level of formality should remain consistent throughout the essay. As a general rule, “Yo” is over the top, but “This essay will begin...” is not very interesting, either. Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes usually works.

- Although it is not necessary at this point, the opening may introduce the question within a specific context. It may offer an example, or a history of the issue, or a general way in which the question is usually understood, or the way that it is treated within current discourse, academic or otherwise.

This is really a combination of opening and background, and certain questions yield themselves especially well to this kind of opening. Either way, one will eventually have to deal with the context of one’s question, in the world.

4 TYPES OF OPENINGS

Although there are many essays that do not open in these ways, there are some typical types of openings that are good to know, and can be used if particularly appropriate to a question, or if a writer is stuck in knowing how to begin.

The most effective opening for a writer who is learning the academic essay is still a series of three to five very specific statements, of direct pertinence to the question being posed, with which a typical reader would agree. However, if one is feeling more adventuresome, and would like to open with stylistic flair, there are several ways to do so.

Narrative Opening

A Narrative Opening, unlike one that begins with a series of statements, begins by telling a story for the reader. It is briefly informal, should be pertinent to the issue at hand, and should be immediately followed by a clear switch to an objective, and even clinical, tone.

This opening can be very useful for emphasis of the real-world consequences of an issue, or simply as dramatic effect to draw the reader in.

Note: It is very important to understand that a narrative, or story, is only effective in an opening. To make this opening work, one must relate it quickly, and then refrain from any storytelling for the rest of the essay. The only exception to this would be that some essays, although not all, will return briefly to the same story in the closing of the essay, providing a kind of stylistic “bookend” effect.

From Phillip Zimbardo “A Pirandellian Prison,” commonly known as “The Stanford Prison Experiment”:

The quiet of a summer morning in Palo Alto, California was shattered by a screeching squad car siren as police swept through the city picking up college students in a surprise mass arrest. Each suspect was charged with a felony, warned of his constitutional rights, spread-eagled against the car, searched, handcuffed and carted off in the back seat of the squad car to the police station for booking. (36)

Student Sample:

Following the scent of my Mom’s apple-cinnamon pie, I see myself staggering childlike to the table. I stretch out with my hand and tip up my toes. My memory ends there.

It was my favorite memory, until recently, when I asked my mother about it. My mom hesitated, and then told me that she had never made apple pie when I was young.

I was shocked. The memory was so vivid. However, upon reflection, I cannot recall any other time that my mother baked. What is it about memory, that we so often have a clear recollection of events that actually never happened?³

The Baited Opening

A *baited opening* basically provides a “hook” for the reader. One can do so by leaving the reader in anticipation of a particular fact, and then withholding it until the end of the opening, thus creating anticipation.

Or, one can create tension by providing an opening that ends with a kind of twist. In the following opening, there is a mixture between narrative opening and baited opening:

From Paul A. Cantor’s “The Simpsons: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family.”

³ Writing 1. Fall 2008. UCSB.

When Senator Charles Schumer...visited a high school in upstate New York...[he] praised the Brad Bill, which he helped sponsor, for its role in preventing crime. Rising to question the effectiveness of this effort at gun control, a student named Kevin Davis cited an example no doubt familiar to his classmates, but unknown to the senator from New York: “It reminds me of a *Simpsons* episode. Homer wanted to get a gun but he had been in jail twice and in a mental institution. They label him as ‘potentially dangerous.’ So Homer asks what that means and the gun dealer says: ‘It just means you need an extra week before you can get the gun.’” (734)

The Oppositional Opening

An *oppositional opening* sets up an issue in a particular way that the reader would find familiar, and then abruptly reverses that position at the end of the opening, making sure that the reader can follow the reason for the reversal. This tends to show how one might look at an issue in a different way, creating justification for the question that is being posed.

Student Sample:

I once believed that “home” was where I was born, the place where I had always lived. “Home” was a sense of living under the same roof as family members, being familiar with surrounding, and following the same daily routines. Home, as I knew it, then, was my neighborhood, my city, and my country: China.

Then I graduated from high school, and moved halfway around the world, to the United States. While the environment was foreign and the culture was completely different, I adapted. In doing so, the United States has become “home,” too. What do we mean by “home”? Is it a place? Is it a house, family, a country, a sense of permanence? Can there be more than one?⁴

Direct Address Opening

“My dear readers, or fellow scholars, or, as some might say, ‘My Fellow Americans,’ this type of address is often used in political speeches, as I am sure you will recognize.”

A *Direct Address Opening* sets up a situation in which the writer speaks in a very obvious manner, to a hypothetical reader, as if the reader and the writer were together in the same room.

⁴ Writing 2. Spring 2009. UCSB.

Note: Although this type of opening is included on this list, frankly, most of the time, it fails. It's like trying to pull off irony in an essay—it is so tricky it's almost not worth attempting.

However, if one finds the idea irresistibly compelling, or if it's just especially appropriate, remember that to avoid failing, three criteria have got to be met:

1. The direct address has got to serve a purpose, in the sense that it must relate directly to the question.
2. The direct address should never solicit either the opinion or the emotional reaction of a reader, which will strike the reader as suspect.
3. Immediately following direct address, you've got to switch very quickly to an objective point of view directly after its use, and refrain from using it for the rest of the essay.

Example:

Imagine yourself in a world where you could not read. That would be illiteracy. Now, answer the following questions: Where is Baghdad, on a map? What caused World War I? Who is the Prime Minister of Britain? What resolution did the U.N. Security Council just pass? What is Humanism? In the United States, many people are unable to answer these kinds of questions. This is also a form of illiteracy. What are the consequences of cultural illiteracy in the United States?

You are under no obligation to use any of these opening strategies. There are many other ways to open an essay: provide a representative example; cite a quotation; define a context. One is also, again, free to simply begin with a few statement that people would find reasonable and fair, and that pertain directly to your question. Remember that the important thing is to find common ground with your reader, and to introduce that question.

5 REVIEW

CHAPTER REVIEW

The information to take from this chapter is that you should use the content of your analysis to determine the organization of your paper. Trying to pick an organizing principle at random, and then making the content fit, will usually result in either a lack of organization, or listing. Some principles of organization include,

but are not limited to: *categories, comparison, causality, taxonomy, focus, or chronology*.

Once initial analysis is performed on a refined critical question, one is ready to determine that organizing principle. In doing so, this creates the first step in writing the draft: the opening of the paper.

The opening of a paper includes a title, which should contain keywords for a catalogue search of your essay. The opening serves two primary purposes: to find common ground with your reader, and to introduce your question.

There is no need to try to fit your writing into any of the openings offered in this chapter; there are many ways to open an essay. Examples of openings in this chapter include: *narrative, baited, oppositional, and direct address* openings.

GRAMMAR REVIEW

Paragraphs

Break your prose into 2–3 paragraphs per page, assuming it is in typical 12-point, double-spaced type. While the rules that are often given concerning *transitions*, or the minimum/maximum number of sentences in a paragraph, are too rigid to actually serve any useful direction in the actual act of writing academic prose, it's important to give your reader a break every once in awhile. One long paragraph is exhausting.

Unlike other forms of textual communication, such as a pamphlet or advertisement, an essay has very few ways to visually organize information for a reader. Use common sense: don't break a paragraph in the middle of an idea, and don't start a new idea in the middle of a paragraph.

VOCABULARY REVIEW

apodosis: in the conditional statement “If X, then Y,” *apodosis* would be the “Y” statement. For example, in the statement “If it rains, then I will bring an umbrella,” the second part of the sentence would be the *apodosis*

Organizing Principles:

causality: outlines a chain of reasoning that is logical in nature, based upon conditional statements of *protasis* and *apodosis*

categories: identifies the major points of an analysis and take them one by one, returning each conclusion to the question

chronology: established time periods, from most recent to earliest, or earliest to most recent

comparison: locates specific points of similarity or difference between two things, or among three or more things

focus: using something external to the element of analysis as a of lens through which to organize conclusions

taxonomy: identifying types and subtypes

protasis: in the conditional statement “If X, then Y,” *protasis* would be the “X” statement. For example, in the statement “If it rains, then I will bring an umbrella,” the first part of the sentence would be the *protasis*

recursive writing: although this technique can be used in several ways, in this sense it means returning individual conclusions that one finds to the initial question that one is answering. Each conclusion builds an overall series of reasonable statements that support the final answer

Types of Openings:

baited: “hooks” the reader by providing a twist at the end of the opening, or making the reader wait until the end of an opening for a vital piece of information

direct address: sets up a situation in which the writer directly addresses the reader

narrative: telling a story to the reader

oppositional: introduces an issue, and then immediately opposes that point of view

6 ORGANIZING/OPENING THE ESSAY

On the following pages, you will find:

Step 5: The Opening/Organizing Principle Guide

STEP 5: THE OPENING/ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE GUIDE

PART 1

Provide the opening to your essay, usually less than 1 page, but sometimes more, depending on the length of the paper involved.

Format this opening according to the discipline in which one is writing, or guidelines given by an instructor. The guide you consult for formatting must be current, because rules change every year.

- If the essay falls under writing in the Humanities, and the instructor will accept it, use the MLA style format offered in the example. Essays in the social sciences can also use this format.
- If the essay writing is in the Humanities, but especially in the discipline of History, and the instructor will accept it, one has the choice of using Chicago format. Essays in the social sciences can also use this format.
- If the essay writing falls under the social or hard sciences, and the instructor will accept it, use APA format. In this case, one would do the following, at this initial stage:
 - Omit the Abstract page, which is written last
 - Leave space for, but do not yet include, the statement of findings (conclusion) in the opening of papers within these disciplines, since they are also usually written last.

Instead, outline the elements that always follow the statement of findings, which is the statement of the question at hand, as well the methodology that will be used.

PART 2

Explain how you plan to organize the paper in light of your analysis.

Remember that you should not yet come to any conclusions regarding your question. This should be an introduction, followed by a plan for organizing the body of your paper.

The length of the explanation of your organizing principle will depend on whether you tend to be a pre-writer (someone who fills in the detail within that organization beforehand, resulting in what is commonly called an *outline*) or someone who is content with a more general plan of action.

As a result, Part 2 can range anywhere over 1 page in length, and sometimes considerably longer. Either is fine, although the second will result in less work on the draft, because you will have already resolved smaller organizational issues.

[in header] Lastname 1

FirstName LastName

InstructorName

Name of Class

00 Month 0000

First Line of Title:

Second Line of Title

The opening to an essay should provide certain elements to your reader. The most important purpose that it serves is to establish that you are reasonable and fair. The second is to create the opportunity to introduce the question at hand. For writers learning the essay form, the question should be explicit, and placed at the end of the opening.

One of the simplest ways to create the desired effect is to make three to five statements concerning the question at hand, and with which your reader would tend to agree. This does not mean making sweeping, general statements, which would be called *throat-clearing*. An opening that offers three to five statements that you make, to be effective, must be pinpoint specific, directly related to the question at hand, and conclude with that question.

On a separate page, explain your organizing principle. It does not have to follow one of the kinds of openings listed in the chapter. You are creating a plan that outlines how the material from your analysis suggests a means of proceeding in the body of your paper.



CHAPTER 7

ARRANGEMENT

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