

DRAMATIC OPENERS—HOOKS

Dramatic openers are designed to grab the reader’s attention. A dramatic opener for a single paragraph is often a very short sentence placed before the topic sentence. More often, dramatic openers are used to begin an entire report or essay. In these, another very short sentence may also be placed at the end of the essay or report to remind the reader of the opening. These would then frame the composition.

Some examples of several different types of hooks follow. Each of them could work well in any type of composition—descriptive, narrative, or persuasive.

QUESTION

What is of more value than gold?

(Essay on friendship)

Possible closing: A man with many friends is richly blessed.

STATISTIC/FACT

I was thirteen years old when I first visited our nation’s capital.

(Essay about how a trip to Washington, D.C. was inspiring)

Closing: Now ten years later, I hope to return, not as a tourist, but as a lobbyist.

QUOTE

“We the people of the United States...”

(Report on the Constitution of the United States)

Closing: The rights guaranteed by our Constitution ensure that the real power of the government is in the hands of the people.

SHOCK

Television is electronic heroin.

(Essay on the dangers of too much T.V.)

Closing: Don’t become an addict.

SUSPENDED INTEREST

(Leaves out important information to entice the reader to read on to discover the meaning)

No one has been able to explain the strange disappearances.

(Report on the Bermuda Triangle)

Closing: We may never know.

AN IMPERATIVE (command)

Look into the heavens and count the stars if you can.

(Report on outer space)

Closing: Man will never fathom the expanse of the universe.

FRAGMENTS

Kids. Kids everywhere. As far as I could see!

(Narrative about the writer’s first job in a day care)

Closing: I learned to pray each day to have an impact on just one of those kids.

NAME DROPPING (famous names, places)

The statue of Liberty is a welcoming symbol of freedom.

(Report on Ellis Island)

Closing: Immigrants from many lands know that special lady who greeted them.

ANECDOTAL OPENERS & CLOSERS

An **anecdote** is a short story. An anecdotal opener, then, is a short narrative (story-like) paragraph placed at the beginning of a report or essay.

The purpose of this type of opening is to capture your reader's interest. A story is usually more interesting than a report. To do this well, the paragraph must include the same elements as a well-written story:

- plenty of vivid description using five-senses words
- an appeal to the readers' emotions

In biographical reports, the anecdote should help the reader feel as if they know the person being written about more personally. It should reveal his or her character, thoughts, and/or emotions. With this in mind, try to choose a situation that reveals the personality of the person you are writing about.

Here are some samples from students.

In a dingy hut next to a dingy alley a small boy sat alone and hungry. Suddenly the door burst open and his drunken father stumbled in. He violently beat his son until he became tired and staggered away. This was a typical night in the life of young Joseph Stalin.

(Report on Joseph Stalin)

His childhood beatings did more than shape his character; they made a young boy more heartless than his abusive father.

Obscure German voices behind the door were yelling—barking out orders. It was impossible to make out what they were saying. The ground seemed to quiver along with the young girl. Without the secret knock, the door flew open and before her stood her worst nightmare. It seemed as if events like this only happened in fairy tales, and in the end everything turned out all right. Anne was scared as she clung tightly to the hope that everything would turn out fine.

(Essay on Anne Frank)

Tragically, unlike the traditional fairy tale ending, Anne never lived happily ever after. But she left us with something fairy tales do not. She left us with an authentic drama of what it was like to live in mortal fear without giving up hope for a better life.