



The Michael and Kathleen Clem History Writing Center

of the

Harrison Ruffin Tyler Department of History

347 James Blair Hall

Write1@wm.edu

www.wm.edu/hwc

Interesting Intros

Professors have read countless papers that begin with an opening sentence like this: "The Civil War was one of the most important events in American history." True, but boring. Why not start with a little more zing? As a writer of history, you need to make sure that your first few sentences capture and maintain your audience's attention. Below are some examples for how you can spice up your introduction. Be sure to ask your professor for guidance if you have any doubts about the style of your introduction.

Controversy: Some historians argue that President Dwight David Eisenhower was out-of-touch, old-fashioned, and not in total control of his administration; others insist that he was well-informed, up-to-date, and in complete command of his subordinates.

Surprise: A slightly older man, garbed in a dirty frock coat without any insignia and wearing muddy boots, was neither an often-passed-over aide nor a common soldier, but was instead General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the entire Union Army.

Contradiction: Medieval midwives were neither trained doctors nor complete amateurs in anatomy, neither true pharmacists nor novice herbalists.

Statistics: Out of the seven-hundred-and-fifty-thousand soldiers who died during the Civil War, only one in sixty died outright on the battlefield, whereas one in thirteen succumbed to disease in the "safety" of their camps.

Current Event Reference: The recent debate about the flying of any form of the Confederate flag over statehouses throughout the South offers a lesson in the longevity of the idea of the "Lost Cause" and insight into the strength of Southern nationalism.

In addition to grabbing your reader's attention with an interesting introduction, your opening paragraph will need to present your thesis. See our handout on argumentative theses for help with this task!