



University of Southern Mississippi, Department of History's

History Writing Lab

464 Liberal Arts Building, 601-266-4086,

historywritinglab.usm@gmail.com

<http://www.usm.edu/history/writinglab.html>



Interesting Intros*

Professors have heard countless papers that began with an opening like this: "The Civil War was one of the most important events in American history." *True, but boring.* Why not create a beginning with more zing? As a writer of history, you need to make sure that your first few sentences capture and maintain your audience's attention. Be sure to ask your professor for guidance if you have any doubts about the style of your introduction. Below are some examples how you can enliven 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 fish nor fowl, neither trained doctors nor complete amateurs in anatomy, neither true pharmacists nor novice herbalists.

•Statistics

Out of the six-hundred-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.

•Quotation

In his book *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800*, Billy G. Smith states: "Common people are no less worthy of historical research—and at least are equally deserving if only because of their sheer number—than groups who wielded greater political, social, or economic power."¹

¹ Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), xi-xii.

●Current Event Reference

The recent debate about the flying of any form of the Confederate flag over state-houses throughout the South offers a lesson in the longevity of the idea of the “Lost Cause” and insight into the strength of Southern nationalism.

●Proof of Authority

Having visited several battlefields from both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, I can more easily comprehend the differences in the scope and the nature of warfare between the two, very different, conflicts.

**Note: The use of the first person pronoun, “I” should be used sparingly, if at all, in history writing. Check with your professor for specific instructions.*

Remember, these examples are only a sampling of the many different ways you can start out a paper that will grab your reader's attention. The key is creativity, and your own imagination is your only boundary.