

Lesson 6 — Writing the Introductory Paragraph

Exercise 1 Analyzing Introductory Paragraphs

The introductory paragraph is often the most important part of a DBQ essay. In it, you should re-state the DBQ topic or question in your own words and offer any background information needed to clarify it. You must present a clear thesis or answer to the DBQ. And you may want to hint at how you will back up your thesis. But if you do, avoid phrases such as, “I will prove that,” etc. Usually such sentences just repeat details that will appear later in the essay as well. Your goal instead should only be to suggest broadly how you will support your thesis. To sum up, do the following in your introductory paragraph:

- **Describe the overall topic, or reword the DBQ and give it context.**
- **State the thesis clearly as an answer or direct response to the DBQ.**
- **Perhaps hint at your main points or your approach in backing up the thesis.**
- **But do NOT go into details and explanations that will be used to support the thesis.**

For this two-page exercise, you will evaluate five introductory paragraphs. Each responds to the DBQ presented in the box. Read the DBQ and each introductory paragraph carefully. Then answer the questions following each paragraph. In class, discuss your answers.

You will use these same five introductory paragraphs in Exercise 2.

Instructions: Document-Based Essay

This question is based on the ten documents for this lesson. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and any point of view presented in it. Using information from the documents, and your knowledge of United States history, write a well-organized essay answering the following DBQ.

Historical Context:

In the 20th century, all-powerful “totalitarian” states appeared in several large nations. These totalitarian governments destroyed all individual liberty and often acted in violent, even genocidal ways. Yet a large share of citizens under such governments were deeply, almost fanatically loyal to them.

The Question

Explain the appeal of 20th century totalitarianism in both its communist and fascist forms. How were these two forms of totalitarianism like and not like each other in the appeal they held for their supporters?

Introductory Paragraph 1

The rise of Hitler in the 1930s was backed by millions of Germans as a great triumph. They felt that way because of their intense hatred of the Treaty of Versailles. That treaty, which ended World War I, forced Germany to give up land, disarm, and pay huge reparations to the victors. It was seen by many inside and outside of Germany as vindictive. Hitler was the strong man many Germans longed for because they felt such a powerful and aggressive leader was needed to restore German power. The popularity of this totalitarian dictator rested on his ability to offer his people a sense of pride and a sense of revenge against their enemies, both outside and inside the nation.

1. Can you find a thesis statement here? If so, underline the sentence or key phrases in it.

2. What phrases or sentences, if any, show how the writer of the paragraph will prove a thesis:

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Exercise 1 (Continued) Analyzing Introductory Paragraphs

Introductory Paragraph 2

Three of the most oppressive totalitarian systems of the 20th century were the communist dictatorships of Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong and the fascist regime of Adolf Hitler. There were many differences between these systems, but all three had key things in common. Each destroyed all individual liberty. Each substituted the total control of one all-powerful leader for the rule of law. And all promised a society of abundance, strength and perfect social harmony. For millions of citizens living poor and insecure lives at a time of great turmoil, this promise was what made these totalitarian systems so attractive.

1. Can you find a thesis statement? If so, underline the sentence or key phrases in it.
 2. What phrases or sentences, if any, show how the writer of the paragraph will prove a thesis:
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Introductory Paragraph 3

Communism and fascism both led to totalitarian systems of government in the 20th century. In each case, all-powerful leaders (Stalin, Mao, or Hitler) crushed civil liberties and caused the deaths of millions. But these systems differed from one another in major ways. In this essay, I will show how they differed and how they were similar. First, I will look at how fascism pictured Jews as the enemy. This differed from communist systems, which hoped to make all people equal by getting rid of the capitalist class and its supporters.

1. Can you find a thesis statement? If so, underline the sentence or key phrases in it.
 2. What phrases or sentences, if any, show how the writer of the paragraph will prove a thesis:
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Introductory Paragraph 4

Communist and fascist forms of totalitarianism shared much in common. And each had millions of fanatical supporters. But the appeal of these systems differed in two fundamental ways. They differed greatly in the kind of ideal or perfect society they promised and in the type of evil enemy they pictured in order to keep their people terrified and loyal. The regimes headed by Mao and Stalin, on the one hand, and Hitler, on the other, illustrate these differences.

1. Can you find a thesis statement? If so, underline the sentence or key phrases in it.
 2. What phrases or sentences, if any, show how the writer of the paragraph will prove a thesis:
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Introductory Paragraph 5

In Document 2, Goebbels speaks of “of a true community of the people “ that only the Nazi Führer Adolf Hitler could create. Stalin vowed to catch up to the capitalists powers and surpass them in just a few years of super-human struggle. The dictators projected images of total and awesome power, as illustrated in the photo of Hitler (Document 1) and the posters of Stalin and Mao (Documents 3 and 7). It was blind faith in such seemingly all-powerful leaders that made it possible to believe in their utopian promises.

1. Can you find a thesis statement? If so, underline the sentence or key phrases in it.
 2. What phrases or sentences, if any, show how the writer of the paragraph will prove a thesis:
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Exercise 2 Choosing an Introductory Paragraph

Re-read the DBQ and the five introductory paragraphs in Exercise 1. Also go back and study the primary source documents for this lesson. Now, decide which introductory paragraph of the five is the best and which is the worst. In the spaces provided here, identify and explain your choices. Share your decisions in a class discussion about the right way to write an introductory paragraph for a DBQ essay.

The BEST Introductory Paragraph is _____

Explain your choice

The WORST Introductory Paragraph is _____

Explain your choice

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Exercise 3

Completing an Essay Using One Introductory Paragraph

In Exercise 2, you chose what you saw as the best introductory paragraph from a group of five. Are you still satisfied with your choice? If so, copy that paragraph in the space below and complete an entire DBQ essay supporting the ideas in that introductory paragraph. If you have changed your mind, choose one of the other four introductory paragraphs and use it as the start of a complete DBQ essay of your own. (Use additional sheets for your essay if you need to.)

The Question

Explain the appeal of 20th century totalitarianism in both its communist and fascist forms. How were these two forms of totalitarianism like and not like each other in the appeal they held for their supporters?