
Opening Paragraph Worksheet

Complete this after the draft exists — before you write the opening. The opening should introduce the piece you wrote, not the piece you planned.

1 — WHAT THE PIECE ACTUALLY DELIVERS

Write the central argument or claim as it exists in the finished draft — not as you planned it, but as you wrote it.

In one sentence:

2 — THE READER

Who is reading this piece?

Be specific — not a demographic, but the kind of attention this reader brings.

What do they already know about this subject?

What do they need from the first paragraph?

Orientation / A reason to continue / Both

3 — WHAT THE OPENING MUST ESTABLISH

The first paragraph must locate the reader in three ways before it ends.

The territory — what subject does this piece occupy?

The angle — what is distinctive about how this piece approaches it?

The register — what tone and level of formality does this piece use?

4 — THE REASON TO CONTINUE

The opening must leave something unresolved that the piece will resolve. What question, tension, or claim will carry the reader to the second paragraph?

5 — THE OPENING SENTENCE

Write three attempts at the first sentence. Each should establish the territory and earn the reader's attention in a different way. Choose one.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The one I am going with:
