**ESSAY WRITING:**

**BACKGROUND STATEMENTS & NARROWING STATEMENTS**

**IN INTRODUCTIONS**

Introductions consist of **a background statement**, **a narrowing statement**, and **a thesis statement**.

1. **Background statement**. Make this meaningful to the topic. Do not generalise so much that you could use the same background statement for any essay.

For example, for the following essay question, there are effective and ineffective background statements:

A digital camera should no longer be a necessary purchase for most people because they have access to excellent digital cameras already built in to their smart phone.

To what extent do you agree with this statement? Give reasons to support your argument.

Ineffective: These days, technology has developed in many ways.

Effective: In the last twenty years, digital technology has undergone a revolution.

1. **Narrowing statement**. This is a statement that connects the background with the precise topic. Choose more specific categories and comment on those. Mention the topic without mentioning the essay.

Ineffective: These ways include the internet, electric cars, solar power, augmented reality and improved computer games.

Effective: Two areas that have seen enormous change are the fields of photography and mobile phones.

1. **Thesis statement.** This states clearly what the essay will do, and what main ideas will be dealt with in the essay.

Ineffective: Digital cameras come in many forms and I think it is important to make a good decision when buying one.

Effective: This essay will argue that a digital camera inbuilt into a smart phone is the only camera most individuals will need, and, therefore, a separate digital camera is an unnecessary purchase for most people.

**Exercise 1 – Student Reflection**

What would you do if you had to write a background statement and a narrowing statement to go with each of these thesis statements?

1. In this essay, several consequences of the problem of water pollution will be outlined. Also, several possible solutions to this problem will be discussed.
2. This essay will argue that uniforms at school are a necessary component of the schooling experience for both primary and high school students.
3. This essay will present both the affirmative and the negative viewpoints in response to the question, “Should mobile phones be allowed in the classroom at high school?”

**Exercise 2 – Student Thinking**

**2 Tips for Writing Background Statements**

To write an effective background statement, ask these two questions:

**Tip 1:** What broader category does this topic belong to? (e.g. football belongs to the broader category of sport (and other categories such as “Ways to increase fitness”); a tablet/ipad belongs to the broader category of electronic devices (and other categories such as “Screen-based entertainment device”); a film fits into the broader category of entertainment (or other categories such as “artistic genre”).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader Category** | Sport | Electronic devices | Entertainment |
| **Topic** | Football | Tablet/ipad | Film |

Try some others (below): a pencil; a computer; a boat; the flu; air-conditioning.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader Category** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Topic** | Pencil | Computer | Boat | The flu | Air-conditioning |

See possible answer on page 4. Think of some others as well.

**Tip 2:** Why is this topic important or significant? (e.g. football is important because it is beneficial for people to play team sport, socialise, increase fitness [other reasons are possible too]; a tablet is significant because it is an effective tool of communication at work and a form of entertainment at home [other reasons are possible too]; a film is important because it is a form of entertainment, a way people can spend time together, and it might communicate important messages for a society [other reasons are possible too].

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Importance/**  **significance** | A valuable way for people to socialise / work as a team | An effective way of conducting work and accessing entertainment at home | A way people can spend time together; a way for a message to be conveyed. |
| **Topic** | Football | Tablet/ipad | Film |

**Now, try some others:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Importance/**  **significance** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Topic** | Pencil | Computer | Boat | The flu | Air-conditioning |

**Possible Answers:**

**Tip 1.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader Category** | Stationery | Office equipment | Form of transport | Illness | Household appliances |
| **Topic** | Pencil | Computer | Boat | The flu | Air-conditioning |

**Tip 2.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Importance /**  **significance** | A convenient, manual tool for writing. Needed every day in some jobs. | The world is connected through computers, so it is an essential item for most people / businesses. | Boating has a long history, and it remains one of the major forms of transport for people and cargo. | This illness kills many people every year, so its prevention needs to be taken very seriously. | In hot climates, this increases productivity & quality of life. In cold climates or polluted environments, it is a way of heating or maintaining air quality. |
| **Topic** | Pencil | Computer | Boat | The flu | Air-conditioning |

**Exercise 3 – Student Thinking & Writing**

**Connecting thesis statements with the rest of your introduction**

Look at the thesis statements again.

1. In this essay, several consequences of the problem of water pollution will be outlined. Also, several possible solutions to this problem will be discussed.
2. This essay will argue that uniforms at school are a necessary component of the schooling experience for both primary and high school students.
3. This essay will present both affirmative and negative viewpoints in response to the question, “Should mobile phones be allowed in the classroom at high school?”

What is the topic? 1) Water pollution. 2) Uniforms at school. 3) Mobile phones.

What broader category does the topic fit into? What is the importance / significance of the topic?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader category; importance / significance** |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Topic** | Water pollution | Uniforms at school | Mobile phones |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader category; Importance significance** | Environment problems; To clean up the environment & save animals, people need to be educated about this. | A way of identifying school students. Part of a student’s identity as belonging to a school. | An every day, essential communication device. Main form of communication, shopping, socialising and reading for many people. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Topic** | Water pollution | Uniforms at school | Mobile phones |

What is missing from the table? (Hint: have a look at page 1)

Look at the thesis statement again. Then form a **narrowing statement** that connects the background statement with the topic. Write it into the table above.

Possible answer:

**Exercise 3**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Broader category; Importance significance** | Environment problems; To clean up the environment & save animals, people need to be educated about this. | A way of identifying school students. Part of a student’s identity as belonging to a school. | An every day, essential communication device. Main form of communication, shopping, socialising and reading for many people. |
| **Narrowing statement** | There are a number of solutions proposed to deal with pollution including water pollution. | Some argue that uniforms are necessary while others believe that uniforms should not be compulsory. | There are many advantages and disadvantages of mobile phone usage. |
| **Topic** | Water pollution | Uniforms at school | Mobile phones |

Then, add your thesis statement, and you have the basis of an effective introduction.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Thesis Statement** | This essay will examine the issue of water pollution and its consequences, and then it will discuss several possible solutions to this problem. | In this essay, it will be argued that uniforms are an essential part of a child’s schooling experience for both primary and high school students. | This essay presents arguments for and against high school students being allowed to use their mobile phones in class. |

Note that you haven’t yet been provided with the essay questions. The thesis statement provided tells you what the essay is about. (This is why the thesis statement is the most important part of the essay!)

For your reference, here are the essay questions:

1. Water pollution is a serious problem. Outline the consequences of this problem, and outline some possible solutions.
2. School uniforms for primary and high school students are an important part of the schooling experience and therefore wearing school uniforms is necessary. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
3. Should mobile phones be allowed in the high school classroom? Outline the yes arguments in response to this question, and then outline the no arguments.

**Exercise 4 – Student Writing**

Try the process above to write a full introduction using the following essay questions. Remember to work in this order: thesis statement, background statement, narrowing statement. (For help writing thesis statements, see your teacher).

1. Pencils are manufactured from wood. This creates an environmental problem because native forests are cleared for plantations, causing native species to be destroyed. Examine this problem, and discuss some possible solutions.
2. Air-conditioning is a waste of electricity, and should not be allowed in most workplaces and homes. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
3. People have travelled by boat for centuries. Is it the best way to travel? Write an essay that presents a balance of affirmative and the negative responses to this question.