Introductory Paragraphs

Purpose:

1. To attract the attention of your readers (to catch their interest).
2. To lead them to your thesis by first dealing generally with the subject.
3. To state your thesis, which outlines the purpose of your essay.

How to begin:

1. With an anecdote that leads into the main topic: An anecdote is a very short, interesting narrative - a personalized story that then connects to the larger sense of the essay itself. It’s very important to clarify the connection between the anecdote and the essay itself (see italicized sentence):

   An avid runner, Laura Jones took her health for granted until she began to notice a shooting pain in her shins that became progressively more crippling. Though she dosed herself with aspirin and made an attempt to cut back on the duration of her workouts, the pain increased steadily. Friends advised her to make an appointment with her doctor, but she laughed and said, 'I've never even had a family doctor!' By the time Laura’s pain forced her to seek help, the problem had become chronic. Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.

2. With the setting as background for the exposition to follow:

   Silent except for the buzz of the air conditioner, the tiny room contained nothing whatsoever to catch Laura’s interest as she waited for her doctor. Like all examining rooms, it contained only stainless, functional equipment. The table covered with a paper cloth that rustled when she moved, the chrome instruments aligned on the counter, the predictable posters of musculature and various degenerative joints - all became immediately familiar in the first thirty seconds, after which she tried to guess how many more seconds of her life would be spent waiting to find out what was wrong with her leg. Somehow the suddenness of Dr. Noya’s cursory knock and immediate presence startled her, however; and his words startled her more. “Laura, I wish you’d seen me long before the problem became so serious,” he said. Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.

3. With narration that begins in the middle of the situation, drawing the reader into the topic:
Laura’s doctor patted her shoulder with professional reassurance as he ushered her towards the waiting room. “It’s bad, but it’s not that bad,” he reassured the athletic twenty-four year old, adjusting his gait to her halting limp. “I may have frightened you by referring to ‘chronic’ pain. That doesn’t mean you’ll necessarily hurt every day. But I wish you’d seen me sooner.” Laura’s mind flashed to a picture of herself running each morning, the feel of the air, the stretch of her legs covering mile after mile. When the pain began, she almost laughed it off, treating her symptoms with aspirin, and cutting her workouts back slightly. She’d waited too long to see the doctor, in part because she took pride in the fact that she didn’t “have” a doctor. She was too young, too healthy. Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.

4. With an appropriate quotation that leads to your thesis: (Notice that beginning with a quotation often creates a more formal tone)

“Physician, heal thyself,” Hippocrates commanded, but his injunction to the ancient Greeks no longer applies in these days of increasingly affordable and wide-ranging health care. In the maelstrom of post-graduate life, America’s youth find themselves caught up in establishing careers, refining their personal goals, keeping up with friends and family, and pursuing recreational activities. Laura Jones, for example, never bothered to find a “family doctor,” since she was a single woman in excellent health. When her leg began to hurt after long runs, she dosed herself with aspirin and solicited advice from her friends, laughing off their suggestions to seek professional help. When the pain became unbearable, she flipped through the Yellow Pages and called a specialist, only to learn that her bone spurs and inflammation would be chronic accompaniments to any weight-bearing exercise she attempted. Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.

5. With a statement of opinion that attempts to engage the reader’s feelings:

Members of the now-infamous “Gen-X” age group often find themselves woefully unprepared for adult life; spoiled and passive as children, they see no need to equip themselves responsibly to face adulthood and they often pay the price. Sometimes this irresponsibility can be addressed after a minor lesson, and sometimes the lack of foresight causes more long-lasting problems. Laura Jones embodied a careless attitude toward her own health, and as a result she’s lost the exuberant flexibility that characterizes most twenty-five-year-olds. When Laura first felt pains in her shins, she ignored the signals. She didn’t have a family doctor and made no attempt to seek treatment, thinking the
problem would go away. By the time she was forced to seek help, the injury had created a chronic situation. *Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.*

6. **With a prediction:**

Experts agree that within twenty years, America will be facing a health care crisis. Those who make no attempts to educate themselves about their choices, their health care and their doctors will be at the mercy of second-rate HMO bureaucracies or overcrowded emergency-room physicians. Unfortunately, young people in America lack foresight to make provisions for their own healthcare, and the results can be tragic. Laura Jones embodied a careless attitude toward her own health, and as a result she’s lost the exuberant flexibility that characterizes most twenty-five-year-olds. When Laura first felt pains in her shins, she ignored the signals. She didn’t have a family doctor and made no attempt to seek treatment, thinking the problem would go away. By the time she was forced to seek help, the injury had created a chronic situation. *Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.*

7. **With a reflective question:**

Why is Laura Jones, a formerly healthy young woman, effectively crippled for life? An avid runner, Laura took her health for granted until she began to notice a shooting pain in her shins that became progressively more crippling. Though she dosed herself with aspirin and made an attempt to cut back on the duration of her workouts, the pain increased steadily. Friends advised her to make an appointment with her doctor, but she laughed and said, ‘I’ve never even had a family doctor!’ By the time Laura’s pain forced her to seek help, the problem had become chronic. *Like Laura, many young people have no inclination to acquire a “family” physician before an emergency situation arises, but every independent adult should establish a relationship with a primary physician for several reasons.*

**Other Techniques:**

1. Start with a direct statement of the issue, problem, etc. (This method is good for technical reports, letters of application, etc.)

2. Make a controversial or otherwise surprising remark.

3. Start with an analogy that illustrates the subject. (For example, you can refer to sheep getting fleeced to introduce a topic on con men fleecing the public.)
4. Open with a statistic. (This gives your paper an air of authority.)

5. Make reference to a current event in the college, the community, the nation, etc.—something you can be sure your reader is aware of.

6. Make reference to your authority to write on the subject by citing your personal or professional experience (avoiding first person if possible).

7. Start with a definition (but not something trite like “According to Webster’s dictionary”).

8. Establish the importance of your subject for your reader.

9. Move the reader from the general subject to the specific (such as a discussion of the obligations of citizenship to a thesis about dutifully paying taxes).

10. Begin with an idea that contrasts with the one discussed in your essay (such as a brief discussion on the right to bear arms followed by your argument for gun control).