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Great Beginnings

Has this ever happened to you? You pick up something to read, peruse a paragraph or two, and then decide to put it down. Of course it has, we've all had that experience. Readers can be fickle. They don't want to waste their time reading something that doesn't interest them. And the way most readers determine their level of interest is by reading the beginning and seeing if they like it.

When you think about creating a good beginning for a piece, there are three important criteria you want to meet. A good beginning:

- **Catches the reader's attention.** Somewhere in your first paragraph, maybe even in the first sentence, you've got to come up with something that hooks your reader, something that says "Hey, this is a good piece you're really going to enjoy!"
- **Makes the reader want to read more.** It's not enough just to hook your readers, you've got to reel them in and get them to read the rest of your piece. Your beginning has to have something in it that makes them curious about what's coming up next.
- **Is appropriate to purpose and audience.** Readers want to feel like the beginning of your piece is an invitation to an interesting and enjoyable experience. You don't want to start your piece in a way that makes people feel disrespected. They also don't want them to feel that you're just wasting their time or being silly.

The beginning is the most important part of a piece of writing. Why? Because if the beginning isn't good, readers will never get to the middle or the end. Readers can be very judgmental. They are quick to evaluate a piece as being good, bad, or in between. And often, they make that evaluation after reading just a few sentences. Don't let them get away. Give them a beginning that keeps them glued to your every word. Give them a beginning that reaches out, grabs them by the collar, gives them a good shake, and says, "Hey you, reader, you need to read this!"

Strategies for Good Beginnings

Steal from the best. So how do you find great strategies for good beginnings? Fortunately, good beginnings are everywhere in the reading you do every day. Just about everything you read has a beginning you can learn from. If you study the ways other writers begin their pieces, you can learn how to begin yours.

To help you get started, I'll show you some of my favorite good beginnings. These beginnings come from the writing of kids just like you. They were written by writers as young as first grade and as old as high school. I'll give each one a descriptive name that says a bit about the strategy I think the writer is using. And then I'll tell you why I like them. You can use any of these strategies in your own writing. Just change the words around to match the subject of your piece.

1. Start with an interesting description.

Ashes filled the air when I was around the camp fire. Crackle, crackle it went.

In this beginning to a story about a camping trip, the writer begins with an interesting description of a camp fire. The writer is using sight and sound details that we might not normally think of and this is what makes this beginning effective for me.

2. Start with a sound.

Boom! The trunk slammed. Bang! The car doors slammed as we got out of the van.

Starting with a sound is a simple but effective way to get your reader's attention. In this beginning, the writer uses two sounds and a simple repetition to make the beginning even more interesting.

3. Start with the past in the present.

It is April 10, 1912. The Titanic is going to travel all the way from England to America.

In this history piece, the writer is writing about the past but using the present tense. This pulls the reader into the story by giving it the feeling that the action is happening right now.

More Good Beginnings

4. Start with an exclamation.

“Yeah! We’re going to Disneyland tomorrow! Yeah!” I yelled about as loud as I could.

Readers can’t help but get a bit excited when the first thing they read is an exclamation. Usually, the exclamation is a single word followed by an exclamation mark: “Cool!” or “Awesome!” or “Ouch!” Etc. Then, the next sentence or two tells the reader what is being exclaimed about.

5. Start with a thought.

I’m in big trouble now, I thought to myself.

If you start your piece with someone thinking about something, your readers will almost always want to know why someone is thinking about it. In this lead, don’t you want to know what kind of trouble the person is in?

6. Start with a complaint.

It seems like we never go swimming at Fife pool!

In this beginning, a second grader is complaining to her parents that her family never gets to go to the pool where she likes to swim. She’s expressing strong feelings here and that almost always draws the reader into the story. Of course, if the whole piece was cranky like this, it would get old pretty fast. But for a one-sentence lead, it works well.

7. Start with a surprise.

Wow! I was doing my back hand-spring and I landed it!

Chances are that if the first line of your piece begins with some kind of surprise, your reader will feel surprised, too. This beginning also starts with an exclamation and that helps convey the writer’s feeling in a strong way the reader will be able to relate to.

Even More Good Beginnings

8. Start with a question.

Have you ever been an Editor-in-Chief? Well I'll tell you, it's a big job!

If you ask a question at the beginning, your readers will find themselves wanting to answer it, and this will draw them in. Sometimes, as in this case, you don't actually answer the question at the at all. In other situations, the writer may choose to answer gradually throughout the piece. This is one of the easiest leads to come up with. But you can't use it too often because it will lose its effectiveness if readers can predict when and how you're going to use it.

9. Start with a sound. Start with repetition. Start with a simile.

Screech, screech, screech! The first time we tried to play the recorders it sounded like a lion running his claws down a chalkboard.

This short lead actually combines three different strategies into one. It starts out with the sound of students making awful sounds in music class on their recorders. The sound is repeated three times for emphasis. Then, the writer uses a simile so we can understand just how annoying the sound really was. Any one of these three strategies can be used on their own to make a great beginning. Starting with a simile can be particularly effective.

10. Start with an exclamation. Start with repetition. Start with strong feelings.

Chores! Chores! Chores! Chores are boring! Scrubbing toilets, cleaning sinks, and washing bathtubs take up a lot of my time and are not fun at all.

In this lead, the writer is following a similar pattern. But instead of using a simile at the end, the writer uses a statement of strong feelings. Expressing strong feelings about something at the beginning of a piece usually does a good job of getting a reader's attention and drawing them in.

And Still More Good Beginnings

11. Start with extremely strong feelings.

The very first time I saw asparagus I hated it. I had never even tried it before and I still hated it!

This writer obviously has strong feelings about asparagus. What I also like about this lead is that she's sort of poking fun at herself when she says that she hated asparagus even though she'd never even tried it before. She knows she's overdoing it and that's what makes it sort of funny.

12. Start with a series of questions.

Touch of the flu? Egg in her hair? Poor Ramona!

This is the opening line to a book review of one of Beverly Cleary's "Ramona Quimby" books. In addition to using the two questions in a row, what makes this lead work so well is that the writer seems to be commiserating with the character in the book. Obviously, Ramona has some challenges in this story and the writer of this review is setting us up to want to find out about them.

13. Start with a scary, exciting, or intense moment.

...I tried to run, but I couldn't. The monster seemed like it was growing by the minute! And then, the most horrible thing was about to happen — I screamed and sat bolt upright in bed. I gasped swallowing huge amounts of air.

This writer is starting her piece with the end of a nightmare. Her use of the ellipsis at the beginning tells us that we're right in the middle of something. Then the dash at the end of the dream signals the interruption of her waking up. It's a good description of the intensity everyone feels when they awake suddenly from a bad dream.

Here's another lead from a different story by a different writer that has almost the same quality to it. It's not as scary but it has the same kind of intensity that makes you want to know more:

I woke up swiftly. My senses were blurred, except for my hearing. All I could hear was the sound of footsteps stepping on the creaky board in the hallway.

Good Beginnings Galore

14. Start with your main idea.

I will always love my grandparents' beach house. The way the waves role over the gooey sand and the way the sand weaves in between your toes. The way we pick up barnacle-covered rocks and watch the sand crabs scurry away. The way we dig for clams and end up knee deep in the never ending sand.

I love this lead. This is the beginning of a descriptive essay about a family vacation spot. The writer just starts right off with the one most important thing she wants you to know: “I will always love my grandparents’ beach house.” But then she gives you some nice description to go with it, a few sentences that show you what she loves about it.

15. Start with a hint of something interesting to come.

It all started on an average day. I didn't think anything unusual was going to happen, but boy was I wrong!

One of the best ways to hook your readers is to give them just a hint of something interesting without telling them what it is. This lead does a nice job of that. We can’t help but wonder what unusual thing happened that day.

16. Start with an interesting conversation.

*“We’re moving.”
That’s what she told me. I couldn’t believe it! I had just made the basketball team and was making more friends.
“What!” I exclaimed.*

Most of us can’t resist listening in on a good conversation. That’s why most readers like dialog so much. It’s even better if you can introduce a conflict like the one the writer sets up here. I like how sparse the dialog is; it’s just three words. But the writer gives us a great sense of how final the decision is (the parent obviously doesn’t want to discuss things; the decision has been made) and how frustrated the kid is.

Good Beginnings Ad Infinitum

17. Start by revealing something unusual.

“Company halt!” yelled the drill master. My mom stopped and went into position. Her dog tags clinked as she moved.

I don't know about you, but when I hear a drill master say, “Company halt!” I don't expect to find somebody's mother in the ranks. Of course, there are many women in the military, and many of them either are or will be mothers, but the writer is playing on a prejudice here that he knows most readers will have, a prejudice that makes his lead more effective because it reveals something unusual about the story.

18. Start with an unsettling description.

A flash of lightning illuminates the harsh emptiness of the night. In an orphanage children cry mournfully. They are starving.

Sometimes the best way to get a reader's attention is to show them a picture of something they probably don't want to see. You have to be careful when you do this because you don't want to offend anyone or make them feel so uncomfortable that they stop reading. But this writer is clearly in control of his language and that's what makes it so successful.

19. Start with an unusual image of a character.

Simon Wilson was snacking down on an apple with great gusto.

The thought of a guy tearing into an apple is just strange enough to get your attention. Now, of course, the writer will have to keep it going by continuing with some equally compelling description. There's great word choice here in the verb phrase “snacking down” and in the adverbial phrase “with great gusto.” The strong verb and thoughtful modifier give us a very specific sense of how this person is eating.

Good Beginnings Etc.

20. Start with an interesting anecdote.

On a dark December night in 1776, as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy Delaware River, George Washington said, "Shift your fat behind, Harry. But slowly or you'll swamp the darn boat."

In addition to exhibiting some nice sentence fluency, this lead ends with something we just don't expect to hear from the Father of Our Country. It's funny and it also serves as a good example of the writer's thesis in this research paper: George Washington was really a pretty normal guy and not the aloof, untouchable leader we often think of him as. The writer is using a technique called an "anecdote." An anecdote is a little story within a larger piece that serves as an example of an important point.

Here's another great beginning to a research paper that uses an anecdote to set up the writer's thesis. In this case, the writer is telling a personal story that leads perfectly into the subject of his report:

21 July 1994. Twenty-one shots fired into the air, the traditional volleys of the United States Marine Corps, in commemoration of fallen comrades who sacrificed their lives in one of the bloodiest assaults of World War II in the Pacific theater. It was one of the few contributions by the Americans in this memorial ceremony, and I could not comprehend why the service was so disproportionately representative of Japan. I scanned the assembled crowd, but only periodically noticed an American uniform in the sea of former Japanese troops. I was on the island of Guam, accompanied by my grandfather, at the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the American invasion of this formerly Japanese-occupied island. This particular service was the American-Japanese joint memorial ceremony, the only event which united the American and Japanese veterans during the entire week. I was confused by the low American attendance, having joined hundreds of U.S. vets at the various memorial services earlier in the week. Standing in the crowd, my reaction was one of embarrassment fueled by an expectation that the low turnout of American veterans represented their inability to overcome racial hatred.

The anecdote is one of the most commonly used techniques for beginning a piece of non-fiction writing. You see it all the time in magazine journalism and popular history.

Good Beginnings Cont.

21. Start by describing the setting.

The deafening crowd was packed into the Kingdome on sold-out Buhner Buzz-Cut Night. Hundreds of people, outfitted in brand new buzz-cuts, were enjoying the Mariner game.

You can always start just by setting the scene. It's one of the easiest strategies to use. But use good descriptive language when you do it. A phrase like, "The deafening crowd was packed into the Kingdome" with a nice adjective ("deafening") and a strong verb ("packed"), paints a good picture in the reader's mind and reinforces the feeling of an important night at the ball park.

22. Start by addressing the audience.

You all know Bill Gates. When you hear that name you think "Billionaire" or "Lucky Guy," but you haven't really looked deep enough.

One way to get your readers' attention is just to talk to them directly. Here's another way to do it:

You walk into the dentist's office. You sit down. You try to read a magazine. But it's no use. You're scared and there's nothing you can do about it.

You don't want to use this technique too much. You can easily overdo it. You can annoy your reader and you really don't want to do that, do you?

23. Start by "showing" how someone feels.

I sat in my desk, sweat dripping down my face. I shut my eyes tight, then opened them. I looked at my watch, 11:27. Three minutes! Three minutes until I heard a sound, a sound that would set me free for three months of total nothingness.

This is a great description of a kid who can't wait for the school year to end. But rather than just say something like, "I couldn't wait for the school year to end," the writer gives you an extended description that "shows" you how he feels.

What? More Good Beginnings?

24. Start by telling a story in a comic way.

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed, “What’s John doing out there? Why is he on his hands and knees, Mom?” I looked out the big kitchen window wondering if my eight-year old brother was all right. He was looking distressed. Then he threw up.

Let me be the first one to say that throwing up is not exactly a barrel of monkeys. Under normal circumstances, this is not the kind of beginning I would encourage. But it’s so well written. The key is in the sentence fluency. The writer starts out with some long sentences that set up the scene. And then, as she gets to the “punch line,” she uses two very short sentences that give the whole thing a funny, matter-of-fact quality, as though her little brother does this kind of thing all the time. This is also another use of the “anecdote” strategy.

25. Start by challenging the reader.

Kevin Green, Director of the New Freedom Foundation, a civil rights organization in Atlanta, has something to say about your character.

Another way to get your readers involved is to challenge them in some way. Here, the writer is suggesting, without really saying it, that I might have something wrong with my character and that this guy, Kevin Green, some hotshot from some big foundation, knows how to fix my problem. Hmmm... This kind of lead is sure to get a reaction but sometimes it’s a bad one, so be careful when you do this. The idea is to challenge your readers, not pick a fight with them.

26. Start by focusing your audience’s attention on something important.

In an old tin box hidden under my bed, I keep many things. My 4th grade report card. A ticket to the World Series. My birth certificate. And a few other small things. But there is one thing I care about more than anything else: a letter from my mom.

This whole piece is about a letter that is very important to the writer. So, to get us started, he leads us on a little trip through a box that ends with a very short sentence about the thing he wants us to think about. Many writers will set up their first paragraph this way. They’ll start out in one place and lead you around for a little while until they end up, in the very last sentence, by telling you exactly what the piece is about.

Yes! More Good Beginnings!

27. Start with a list.

The crazy costumes. The kids running wild in the neighborhood. All that candy. And scaring people. Of all the holidays in the year, I love Halloween the most.

This is similar in effect to the previous lead. Here, the writer just gives us a list of descriptive elements without any real context. We're left guessing about the topic. Each item in his list is a sentence fragment, and that adds to the feeling we get of wanting more information. Finally, he tells us what he's talking about and, thankfully, gives us a complete sentence so we can feel that the trail of ideas has come to a proper stopping point.

28. Start with a scenario.

Pretend you are in a department store at your local mall. As you shop, you notice that some things are less expensive than others. Now, look at the labels on these cheaper items. Many of them say, "Made in China," or "Made in Honduras." Why are things made in these countries less costly than things made in America?

In this beginning, the writer puts us in a made up situation for the purpose of having us experience a problem he wants us to know about. Like the other "you" leads, this one will work as long as you don't overdo it.

29. Start with fantasy or fairy tale-type language.

In the good old days, long, long ago, when most movies were black and white, and popcorn only cost a nickel, my grandpa used to take me every Saturday to a double feature show.

This is the beginning to an essay about a kid reminiscing about his grandpa. But the beginning really stands out because he writes it up as though it happened long, long ago in fairy tale time. It's a true story, but this type of beginning fictionalizes it just a bit and that makes it sound like it's going to be more fun than the typical "When I was a kid, I used to go to movies with my grandpa" story. This style of beginning gives the story a child-like, mystical quality that fits the subject matter perfectly.

Good Beginnings (Again? Still?)

30. Start with simple action that leads to a complex realization.

I wave goodbye to my friends, turn into the parking lot, head for my car, reach for the key in my left front pocket, and find nothing. The cold night wind in the nearly empty lot whistles a spooky tune as I look around and realize I'm the only person out here. At least I hope I am.

This is how a lot of good suspense stories begin. In this piece, the author starts by describing a simple walk back to his car after a movie. It seems like he's just doing normal, simple things. Then he can't find his key. But that's not the worst of his problems.

31. Start with a startling statement.

A great crime was committed against a people in 1942. This was the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt which called for the eviction and internment of all Japanese Americans.

This is a great start to a research paper. It draws our attention to the subject matter by casting it in a horrific light. We can't help but have questions like "What crime?" or "Which people?"

32. Start with your thesis.

Education is a key element in developing the skills necessary for a successful life. Too often, students are more involved earning a paycheck than spending time on their academic studies. Students need to realize that their high school classes will prepare them for a brighter future.

This is the beginning of a persuasive essay that discusses the pros and cons of high school students having part-time jobs. The writer is obviously against it. So, she just starts off with her thesis statement around which the rest of the essay will be based. This is not a flashy or unusual way to start a piece. But often, it's very effective, especially if you feel your readers are not in the mood for anything clever or complicated.

Finally! The Last Good Beginnings!

33. Start with something outlandish, eccentric, flamboyant, fantastical.

I am a super hero, often seen jumping tall buildings in a single bound. I have been known to write entire novels in my mind during a 20-minute power nap. I can predict earthquakes. I make good hot chocolate. Once I played all 32 Beethoven piano sonatas note perfect from beginning to end without stopping.

Personally, I find this lead very entertaining. The first time I read it, I almost thought the writer was being serious. Obviously he isn't. This kind of beginning certainly won't be attractive to all kinds of readers. Some will think it inappropriately silly. It's unusual, that's for sure. But the writer seems to be in control of what he's doing. He's doing something unusual in a way that works — at least as I see it — and that's what counts in the end.

34. Start with fast action.

I raced inside, slamming the front door behind me. I plopped my backpack on the floor and dashed for the kitchen. Our cat, asleep in the hallway, quickly awoke and scurried out of harm's way. I knew I only had a few precious seconds before my brother, coming in through the back door, beat me to the kitchen and nabbed the last of mom's brownies.

You can't lose with a good action sequence. One of the secrets to good action writing is the use of interesting verbs (“raced, plopped, dashed, scurried, nabbed”). Strong verbs make for strong writing. In this case, they make the lead sound more dramatic, more intense.

35. Start with a saying.

It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said that “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of simple minds.” He said it almost 200 years ago, but perhaps it bears repeating today to our senators and congressman who act as though our country can continue to spend money it does not have.

So many smart people have said so many smart things. Why not let them speak for you? A common technique is to use a famous saying to make a point. As long as your readers are somewhat familiar with the quotation and its context, this type of beginning works well.

Not-So-Good Beginnings

Strategies you might consider not using. Without disparaging in any way, shape, or form the creative genius of any writer living, dead, or hereinafter to be born, I respectfully request that certain beginnings no longer be used. (Please note: There's not a one of us, myself included, who hasn't used each and every one of these beginnings at some point in time. Now that we're all experts on the best ways to start a piece of writing we can, of course, laugh at these simple lapses in writerly judgment. But let's not forget that we've all had them, too.)

1. The “telephone call” beginning.

Hi! My name is Steve. Blah, blah, blah...

Unless I'm calling someone on the phone to get them to buy something from me, (or writing a piece about telemarketing) there is no legitimate reason why this beginning should ever be used.

2. The completely unnecessary beginning.

In this paper, I will be telling you about blah, blah, blah...

I should always trust that my readers are smart enough to figure out on their own what my piece is about. Telling them ahead of time doesn't win me any points. And, if my piece turns out to be about something different, then I've really gotten myself into a pickle, haven't I?

3. The “non-beginning” beginning.

One day, blah, blah, blah...

While this may be the well-intentioned opening of many an earnest yarn, it is not properly a beginning at all. It doesn't do anything; it just sits there on the paper, staring at us, thinking: “Couldn't come up with a real beginning, could you?” We could all spare ourselves this indignity by simply trying any other beginning at all (as long as it's not on this page). So let's just do it, shall we? Similarly weak variations on the “non-beginning” beginning include “Once...” and “One time...”. Though not quite as bad, but still rather unexciting, the following beginnings may be used on an extremely limited basis and only in desperate situations (such as official prompted writing assessments for state tests): “Last year...”, “Last week...”, “A year ago...”, “Last month,...”, “A month ago,...”, “A week ago...”, “A day ago...”, “A few days ago...”, “A couple of days ago...”, and so on.

Tips for Good Beginnings

Start with the models. The easiest way to get started writing your own good beginnings is to use the models you already have. It isn't considered cheating to model one's writing after the writing of another. The easiest models to start with are the short ones. Some of the strategies can be accomplished in your own pieces with just a single sentence. You'll notice, too, that some of the strategies can be combined. The models are a great resource for you. They will always give you something to think about when you're stuck. And, as you become more familiar with them, they will be easier to use. You'll probably find that you end up being better at some kinds of beginnings than others. That's just fine. You may also find that you like to change your beginnings in certain ways that are different from the models. The models are a starting point. Where you end up is up to you.

Try several beginnings for each piece. I almost always advise writers to try several different beginnings for each piece that they write. This may seem like a lot of extra work. It is. But it's really worth it. As I've said before, the beginning is the most important part of your piece. And you may not necessarily be in the best position to know which beginning is most effective. What I usually suggest is this: Try three different beginnings. Read them all to your class. Let your audience tell you which one they like best. Even if you already have a favorite, get this feedback from your audience. You don't have to do what they want. But it's always good to take the opinions of other writers into consideration.

Reread, rethink, revise. Once you have a lead that you like, look it over closely. Read it to yourself many times. Look for small ways to make it better. Change a word here or there. Improve the punctuation. Give the beginning of your piece extra care and attention so it comes out just right. And don't forget to share it with others to get their opinions, too.

Variety is the spice of life. After a while, you will find that some beginnings come quite easily to you. The temptation will be to use these types of beginnings over and over on every piece you write. Resist this temptation. In the first place, your readers will really appreciate it if you use many different kinds of beginnings. In the second, each type of beginning that you master makes you a better writer.

Start your own collection. Ultimately, you'll want to move away from using the models I've presented here and start thinking about your own models. What kinds of beginnings do you like? Why do you like them? You can collect them the same way I do. When you read a beginning you like, copy it down. When you hear or read something that another writer in your class has come up with, get a copy of that, too. For each beginning you collect, give it a title that describes how it works. Then write a few words about why you think it's good. One of the best ways to learn to write is to model your writing after the writing of other writers you enjoy.

A Glossary of Good Beginnings

- 1. Interesting description.** Ashes filled the air when I was around the camp fire. Crackle, crackle it went.
- 2. Sound.** Boom! The trunk slammed. Bang! The car doors slammed as we got out of the van.
- 3. The past in the present.** It is April 10, 1912. The Titanic is going to travel all the way from England to America.
- 4. Exclamation.** Yeah! We're going to Disneyland tomorrow! Yeah!" I yelled about as loud as I could.
- 5. A thought.** I'm in big trouble now, I thought to myself.
- 6. A complaint.** It seems like we never go swimming at Fife pool!
- 7. A surprise.** Wow! I was doing my back hand-spring and I landed it!
- 8. A question.** Have you ever been an Editor-in-Chief? Well I'll tell you, it's a big job!
- 9. Sound, repetition, and simile.** Screech, screech, screech! The first time we tried to play the recorders it sounded like a lion running his claws down a chalkboard.
- 10. Exclamation, repetition, strong feelings.** Chores! Chores! Chores! Chores are boring! Scrubbing toilets, cleaning sinks, and washing bathtubs take up a lot of my time and are not fun at all.
- 11. Extremely strong feelings.** The very first time I saw asparagus I hated it. I had never even tried it before and I still hated it!
- 12. A series of questions.** Touch of the flu? Egg in her hair? Poor Ramona!
- 13. Scary, exciting, or intense moment.** . . . I tried to run, but I couldn't. The monster seemed like it was growing by the minute! And then, the most horrible thing was about to happen — I screamed and sat bolt upright in bed. I gasped swallowing huge amounts of air.
- 14. Main idea.** I will always love my grandparents' beach house. The way the waves role over the gooey sand and the way the sand weaves in between your toes. The way we pick up barnacle-covered rocks and watch the sand crabs scurry away. The way we dig for clams and end up knee deep in the never ending sand.
- 15. Something interesting to come.** It all started on an average day. I didn't think anything unusual was going to happen, but boy was I wrong!
- 16. Conversation.** "We're moving." That's what she told me. I couldn't believe it! I had just made the basketball team and was making more friends. "What!" I exclaimed.
- 17. Reveal something unusual.** "Company halt!" yelled the drill master. My mom stopped and went into position. Her dog tags clinked as she moved.
- 18. An unsettling description.** A flash of lightning illuminates the harsh emptiness of the night. In an orphanage children cry mournfully. They are starving.
- 19. Unusual image of a character.** Simon Wilson was snacking down on an apple with great gusto.
- 20. Anecdote.** On a dark December night in 1776, as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy Delaware River, George Washington said, "Shift your fat behind, Harry. But slowly or you'll swamp the darn boat."
- 21. Describe the setting.** The deafening crowd was packed into the Kingdome on the sold-out Buhner Buzz-Cut Night. Hundreds of people were outfitted in brand new buzz-cuts and were enjoying the Mariner game.
- 22. Address the audience.** You walk into the dentist's office. You sit down. You try to read a magazine. But it's no use. You're scared and there's nothing you can do about it.
- 23. "Show" feelings.** I sat in my desk, sweat dripping down my face. I shut my eyes tight, then opened them. I looked at my watch, 11:27. Three minutes! Three minutes until I heard a sound, a sound that would set me free for three months of total nothingness.
- 24. Comic story.** "Oh my God!" I exclaimed, "What's John doing out there? Why is he on his hands and knees, Mom?" I looked out the big kitchen window wondering if my eight-year old brother was all right. He was looking distressed. Then he threw up.
- 25. Challenge the reader.** Kevin Green, Director of the New Freedom Foundation, a civil rights organization in Atlanta, has something to say about your character.
- 26. Focus on something important.** In an old tin box hidden under my bed, I keep many things. My 4th grade report card. A ticket to the World Series. My birth certificate. And a few other small things. But there is one thing I care about more than anything else: a letter from my mom.
- 27. A list.** The crazy costumes. The kids running wild in the neighborhood. All that candy. And scaring people. Of all the holidays in the year, I love Halloween the most.
- 28. A scenario.** Pretend you are in a department store at your local mall. As you shop, you notice that some things are less expensive than others. Now, look at the labels on these cheaper items. Many of them say, "Made in China," or "Made in Honduras." Why are things made in these countries less costly than things made in America?
- 29. Fantasy or fairy tale-type language.** In the good old days, long, long ago, when most movies were black and white, and popcorn only cost a nickel, my grandpa used to take me every Saturday to a double feature show.
- 30. Simple action to complex realization.** I wave goodbye to my friends, turn into the parking lot, head for my car, reach for the key in my left front pocket, and find nothing. The cold night wind in the nearly empty lot whistles a spooky tune as I look around and realize I'm the only person out here. At least I hope I am.
- 31. Startling statement.** A great crime was committed against a people in 1942. This was the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which called for the eviction and internment of all Japanese Americans.
- 32. Thesis.** Education is a key element in developing the skills necessary for a successful life. Too often, students are more involved earning a paycheck than spending time on their academic studies. Students need to realize that their high school classes will prepare them for a brighter future.
- 33. Something outlandish.** I am a dynamic figure, often seen scaling walls and crushing ice. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention. I write award-winning operas. I manage time efficiently. Occasionally, I tread water for three days in a row.
- 34. Fast action.** I raced inside, slamming the front door behind me. I plopped my backpack on the floor and dashed for the kitchen. Our cat, asleep in the hallway, quickly awoke and scurried out of harms way. I knew I only had a few precious seconds before my brother, coming in through the back door, beat me to the kitchen and nabbed the last of mom's brownies.
- 35. A saying.** It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of simple minds." He said it almost 200 years ago, but perhaps it bears repeating today to our senators and congressman who act as though our country can continue to spend money it does not have.